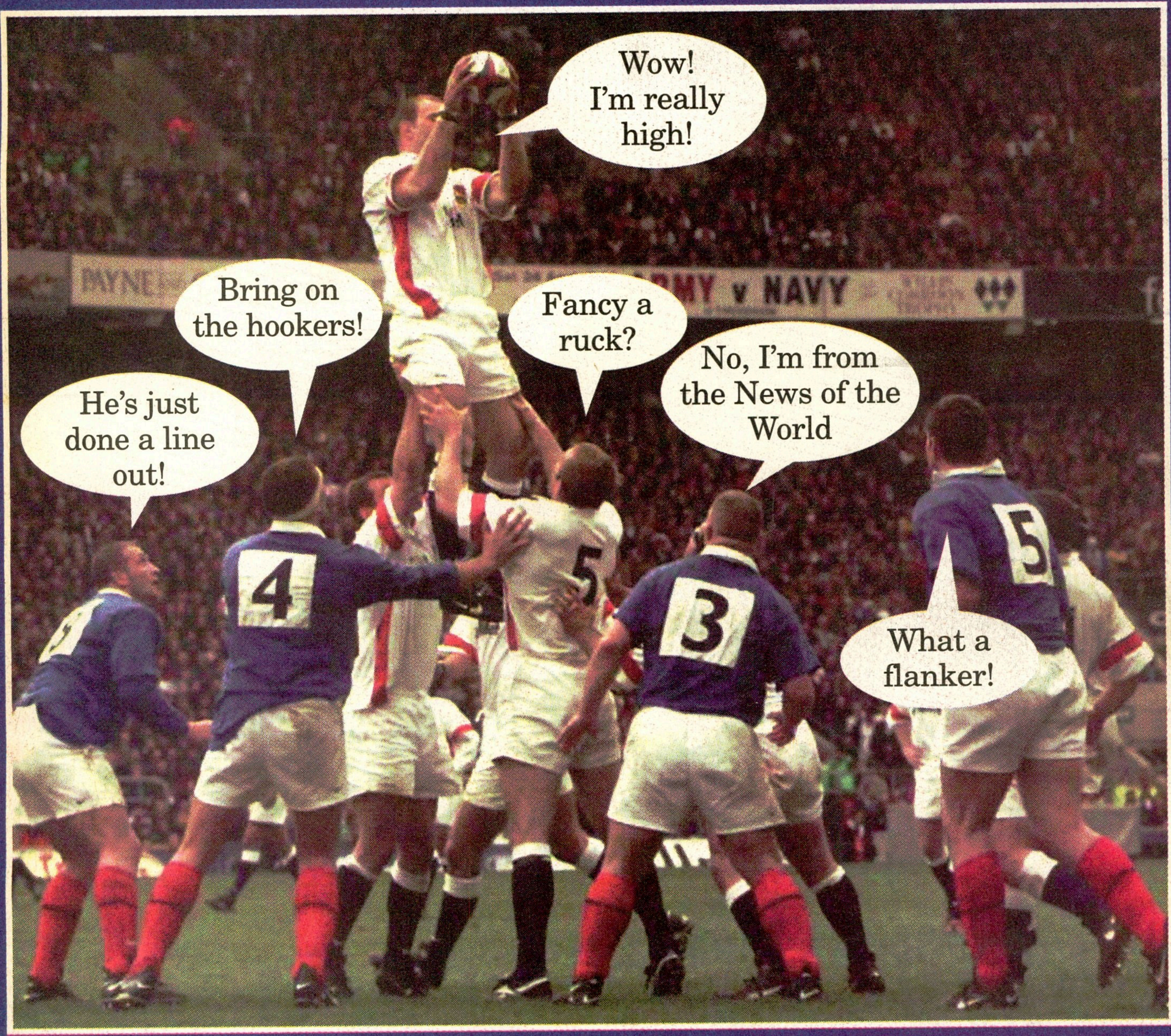
PRIVATE EYE

No. 977
Friday
28 May '99

£1

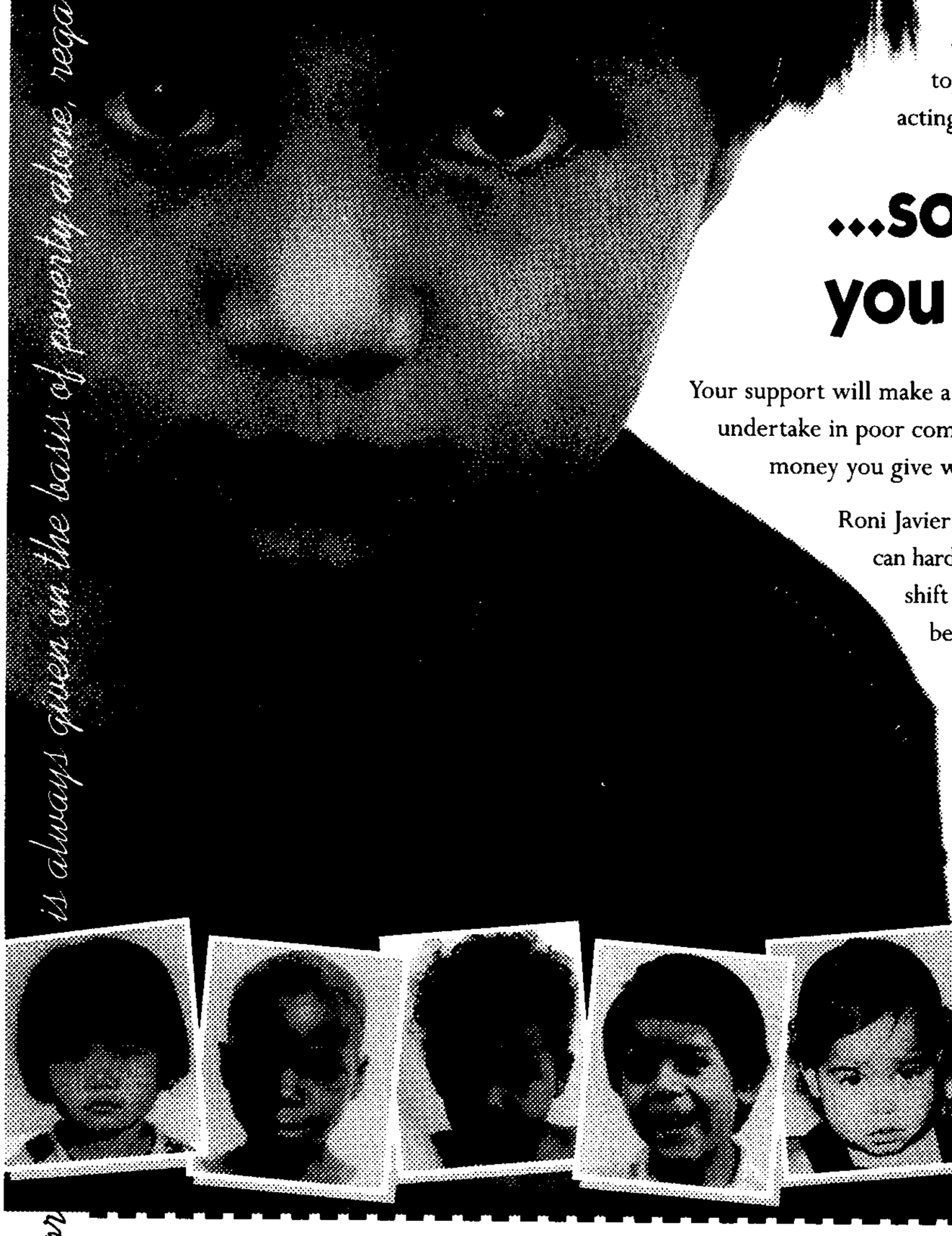
OH NO! IT'S DRUGBY!


Wow! I'm really high!
Bring on the hookers!
He's just done a line out!
Fancy a ruck?
No, I'm from the News of the World
What a flanker!
ARMY v NAVY

A GREAT SUMMER OF SNORT!

Christian Children's Fund of Great Britain is a humanitarian, non-denominational registered charity working with locally owned, long-term projects throughout the developing world and Eastern Europe to help bring healthcare, education and eventual self-sufficiency to children and communities in need. Support is always given on the basis of poverty alone, regardless of race, sex or religion

By tonight, another 35,000 children will be lost through hunger, and disease...



It's almost unbelievable, yet every day 35,000 children in developing countries die from malnutrition and preventable diseases. That's more than 24 every minute!

The cause for most of this terrible suffering is poverty. Without enough food, clothing and medical care, let alone a proper education, the future for a child born in poverty is often tragically short. Many die from hunger and disease. Millions more face a daily struggle simply to survive.

Yet all it takes is £15 a month to sponsor a child, bringing real hope into their life and giving both them and their community the chance of a decent future.

It may seem insignificant to sponsor just one of so many desperately needy children, but by doing so you will join together with the many thousands of other like-minded people acting as sponsors through Christian Children's Fund.

...so why do we ask you to help just one?

Your support will make a priceless contribution towards the vital work that we undertake in poor communities around the world. We guarantee that 80% of the money you give will go directly to help a child and their community.

Roni Javier pictured here, lives with his mother in the Honduras, in what can hardly be called a house. It has a straw roof, a dirt floor and a make-shift hearth for cooking. There is no sanitation and Roni has often been ill and undernourished. Now Roni has a sponsor we are able to work constantly to see to his health and development. The more sponsors we can find, the more children like Roni can be helped to a safer and brighter future.

Somewhere, this very minute a child is waiting to be sponsored by you. Please don't delay - you will make a huge difference to more than just one life.

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Yes, I would like to sponsor a child

PE 54

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Signature for card payments _____

Name _____

Address _____

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In any country OR

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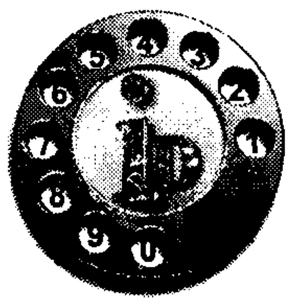

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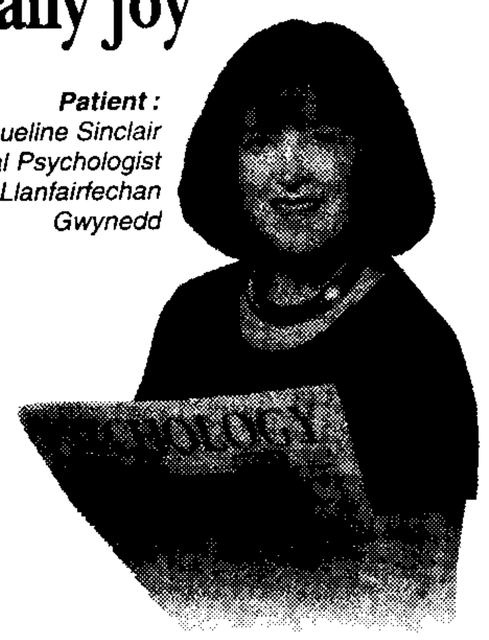

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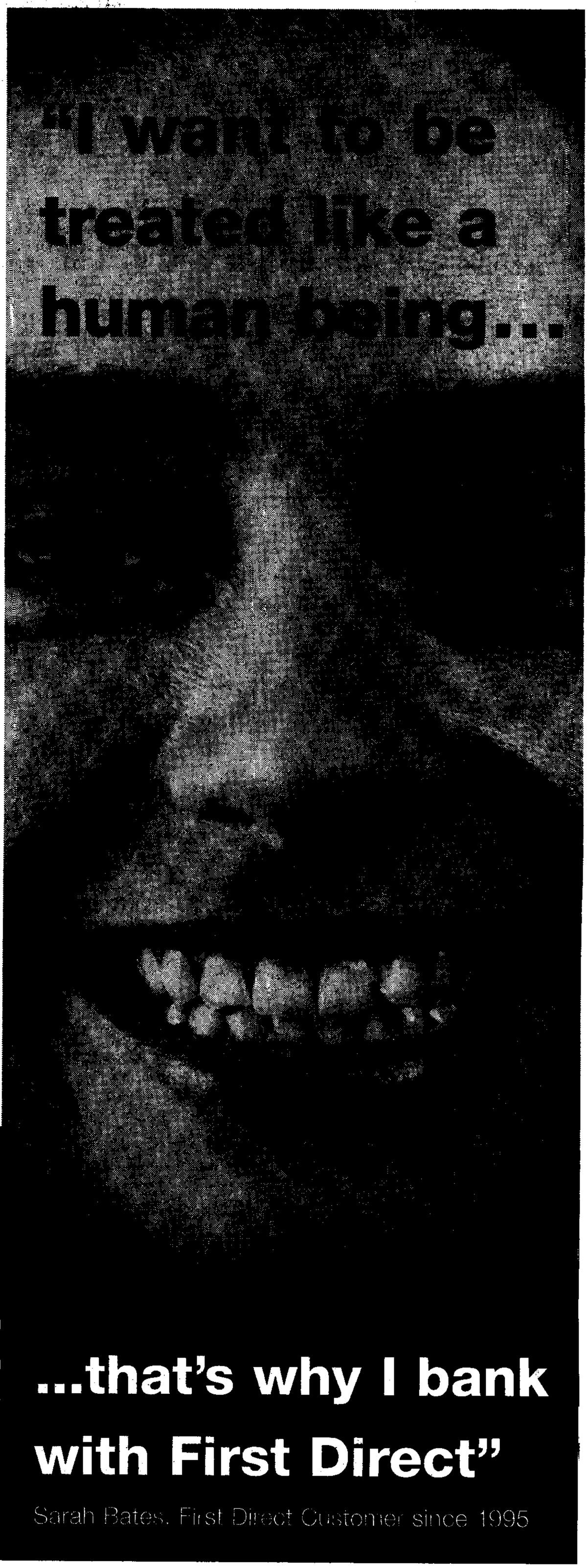

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Sarah Bates, First Direct Customer since 1995

Gnome

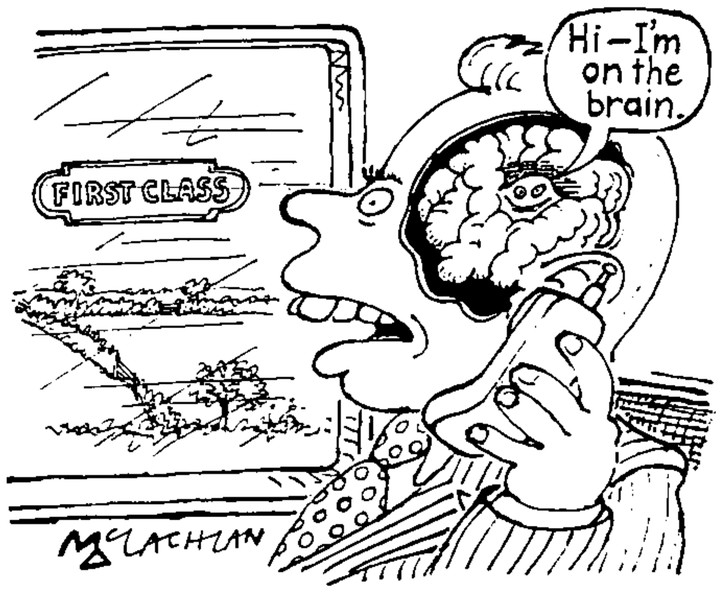
RIVAL newspapers are attempting to dismiss the important revelations in my organ, the Sunday Filth, about drug taking and sexual misbehaviour by such internationally known role models as top DJ Radio 2's Ronnie Disc, soap star Dave Nobody (Detective Sergeant Pilkington in "The Rozzers"), High Society Royal Associate Rupert Parking-Meter and top Indoor Hockey superstar Ally Dullally.

Let there be no mistake. These celebrities set an example to the young people of our nation. Their fame brings them enormous rewards,but with these rewards come responsibilities. And the first of these is to provide front page stories for our readers to enjoy on a Sunday morning whilst sitting on the nation's toilets.

We here at the Sunday Filth are not guilty of lowering standards. No, we are continuing in the noblest traditions of British journalism. And anyone who says otherwise might well find themselves set up by a coke-sniffing bimbo. Understood?

E. Strobes
Editor
News of the Wired
Wifes Wapping
London SLE AZ1.

TUMOUR SHOCK?



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COLOUR SECTION

POOR Clare Short, beleaguered international development secretary, has been snubbed again by cabinet colleagues.

She was furious that her department had been excluded from the committee considering genetic foods – particularly because of concerns that unscrupulous biotech companies might dump unwanted GM products in the developing world, her area of responsibility.

Biotech companies have been developing so-called "terminator" genes, which render seeds sterile. This could mean that countries or farmers would have to buy a whole new batch of seeds every growing season.

Late last week Jack Cunningham, chair of the committee on bio-technology and genetic modification, was hastily trying to make amends by appointing her deputy George Foulkes – too late of course for him to have any impact on the committee's first controversial endorsement of Frankenstein foods.

● *More HP Sauce, 8 & 9*

1 in 3 Number crunching

■ Labour MPs who voted against the government on incapacity benefit cuts

■ recent cabinet meetings that Tony Blair has bothered to attend

WITH the government totally at odds with public opinion over genetically-modified (GM) food, who will take on the political "hot potato" of chairing its new food standards agency (FSA)?

Step forward leading contender Professor Philip James, said to be prime minister Tony Blair's favourite.

Director of the Rowett Institute, the Aberdeen centre for nutritional research, Prof James was swift to suspend Dr Arpad Pusztai last August after his research suggesting that potatoes modified with a snowdrop gene had damaged the internal organs of rats was featured on *World In Action.*

Last week a panel of scientists declared that Dr Pusztai's evidence of health risks from GM food was fundamentally flawed. Nevertheless, Prof James has himself admitted to having qualms about GM foods. In April 1997 he compiled a report for Labour, then in opposition, on forming a new food standards agency in which he wrote: "The recent introduction... of genetically modified soya and its unidentified presence in a wide range of foods has caused concern and is a worrying precedent."

Could telephone calls from Number Ten have helped Prof James, who at the end of June is standing down as director of Rowett, reach a decision on what to do about Pusztai?

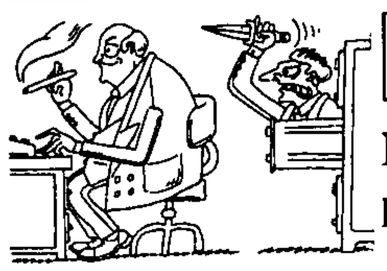
We shall of course never know. Blair refuses even to answer parliamentary questions about his conversations with the US president Bill Clinton in which the latter pleaded the case of the GM lobby. The first such parliamentary question was put to him by Lib Dem MP Norman Baker on 3 November 1998. In addition to at least three phone calls on the issue, Tony and Bill are said to have played a round of golf during which GM organisms were the main topic discussed. Can this be true?

● *Muckspreader, 12*

MORE news on the race to put Humpty together again as soon as the bombing stops. Colin Adams, executive director of the British Consultancy Bureau (which represents many engineers, architects and planners working overseas) sent an email to his members two weeks ago about "contingency planning to ensure that British companies gain maximum benefit from reconstruction projects in Kosovo and adjacent countries once the war finishes".

Adams has also been lobbying Whitehall chieftains at British Trade International (the DTI's export arm) and the department for international development. "We accept that while the war is going on there are no opportunities," a BCB spokesman told the *Eye*. "What we don't want is for American contractors to go in as soon as the last bomb falls and get all the reconstruction work. In Bosnia and Kuwait the Americans were too quick off the starting blocks, and we don't want that to happen again." Especially since the cost of rebuilding Serbia and Kosovo is estimated at £30bn.

Meanwhile the bosses of several large American companies have already been summoned to Washington by the US government to discuss how they can be even quicker off the blocks this time. Isn't the transatlantic special relationship grandy and dandy?



IN THE BACK

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● *Crimewatch: That Knackered format* 10
● *Flettwatch: From dumpee to dump bin* 25
● *Fuggin' Bubble Competition: Results* 19

100 YEARS AGO

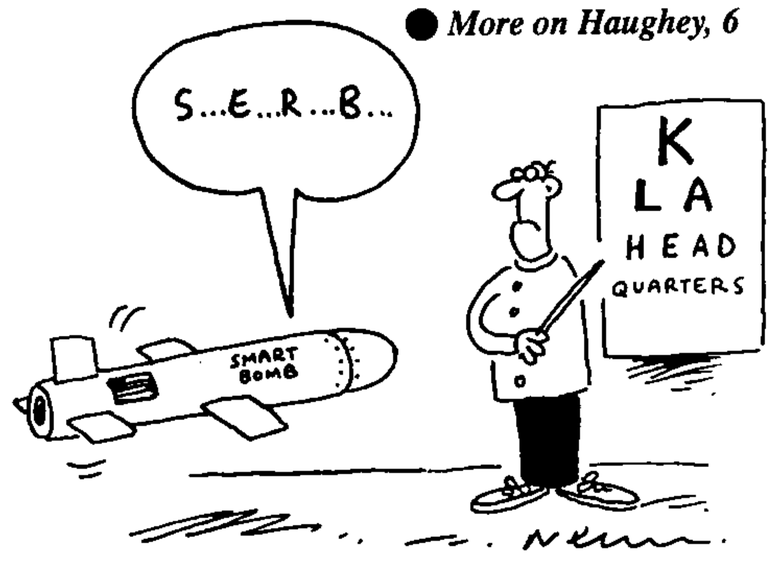
"Less well known to the Irish public is Haughey's keenness for what might be termed 'horizontal jogging' — an exercise in which he loves to indulge with hackette Terry Keane."

— *Private Eye* 463, 14 September 1979. Further bulletins about the fiery affair between the hackette and the Taioseach appeared in *Eyes* 470, 471, 478, 480, 481, 502, 564...

"On Friday, Ireland was transfixed when the English-born wife of a Supreme Court judge confessed on television that she had been Haughey's mistress... Terry Keane, a 59-year-old Dublin journalist... astounded the audience of *The Late Late Show*..."

— *Sunday Times*, 16 May 1999, marvelling at how the "secret affair" had somehow "escaped scrutiny" for more than 20 years

● *More on Haughey, 6*



Street Of Shame

"JAGUAR Gave Labour Leader Half-Price Car," screamed the *Sunday Times*'s front-page last weekend, over an Insight story revealing that Alan Donnelly MEP, leader of the Labour group in Strasbourg, was leasing a Jag at just £600 a month instead of the usual £1100. The deal "leaves him open to claims of a potential conflict of interest", the paper claimed.

This must have surprised the *Sunset Times*'s own columnist Jeremy Clarkson. Two months ago he told the *Eye* that he had not one but *four* Jaguars on indefinite loan. "I've got lots of cars on free loans," he admitted cheerfully. "If they're really good I just don't give them back. Everybody does it. We've all got Jags."

If a half-price Jag for an MEP represents a potential conflict of interest, what price four freebie Jags for a motoring correspondent?

IRISH hackette Terry Keane's kiss 'n' tell about her affair with Charlie Haughey may be the least revealing revelation in years, but the way her story came to be told is rather more interesting.

Keane has long occupied the back page of Tony O'Reilly's *Sunday Independent* with a pisspoor "diary" featuring estate agents, hairdressers and PR people, plus constant references to her lover "Sweetie". Anyone who didn't realise that Sweetie was Haughey must have been brain dead. However, as Haughey was finally forced out of power, and his corrupt dealings began to be exposed, Keane's unique selling point diminished in value. By the beginning of this month, she was reduced to using the "offer" of an allegedly massive golden hello from the *Sunday Times* to improve her contract with O'Reilly. When her request for a huge pay rise was refused, she secretly signed up with Rupert Murdoch.

On Thursday 12 May, she invited Haughey to lunch and casually mentioned that she was about to sell their intimate secrets to the *Sunday Times*. On Friday, she made a rare daytime appearance at her office, first carefully collecting her belongings before handing over a letter announcing her immediate resignation. That night she turned up on Gay Byrne's *Late Late Show* puffing the *Sunday Times* story.

The *Independent* retaliated with a pre-emptive strike in its Saturday edition. "While the Irish media didn't publish anything about their affair, the British satirical magazine *Private Eye* did, and even coined a phrase to celebrate their friendship: horizontal jogging," the paper noted, in the hope of making a purchase of the following day's *Sunset Times* unnecessary. (Older readers may recall that at the time of the *Eye*'s revelations, 20 years ago, Haughey's hopeless son Ciaran ordered a group of party hacks to drive around Dublin newsagents buying up every copy of the mag.) The *Independent* also claimed that la Keane "is to receive a financial package worth almost £600,000 over two years from the *Sunday Times* for her act of ultimate betrayal".

Not so. Keane used the fictitious £600,000 offer as leverage when demanding more money from the *Independent*. The *Eye* has learned that she is actually picking up £75,000 for serial rights and a £40,000 salary, for the next two years, for a weekly diary – though it seems unlikely that she will last that long.

The wretched Keane now faces the prospect of a tell-all book by former colleagues at the *Independent* (one of whom has already been threatened by Haughey's henchmen) – and, more worryingly, possible subpoenas from the various tribunals and courts probing her lover's career. For, in passing, her *Times* tale included admissions about Haughey's role in importing guns for the IRA – "one of the first things that struck me was Charlie's venom about the arms [trial]. Of course he was guilty but so were the rest" – and numerous scams, many using British banking facilities. She says that when news broke of businessman Ben Dunne's covert £1m gift, "I could think of a few others who might have given to Charlie too..."

For years his allies claimed that Haughey was the victim of British dirty tricks because of his deeply felt attachment to Ulster, with rumours about his sex life and finances being spread from Whitehall to discredit him among the God-fearing Catholics. Now it turns out that the rumours actually understated his true venality. Is it possible that, far from undermining him, British intelligence decided for some mysterious reason to keep Haughey in power by ensuring that the full truth about his behaviour remained hidden, at least until he was forced out of office?

HARD CHOICES

13 pages devoted to The Mirror's Pride of Britain Awards in The Mirror

½ page devoted to Nato's war in Yugoslavia in The Mirror

20 Mirror staff reporting on the Pride of Britain Awards

2 Mirror staff reporting on Labour revolt against disability benefits

The Mirror

O·B·N

I am an admirer of the Duke of Edinburgh... I like and respect him. I like his style, his sense of humour, his hands-on approach, his ability to make a difference while others, mostly, only make a noise. I envy his energy. I admire his achievement. I think he deserves to be better understood... He is tolerant, kindly, amusing, amused... To me he seems to be a quite remarkable man, dealt a bizarre hand which he has played pretty flawlessly.

GYLES BRANDRETH
The Sunday Telegraph

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

BBC governors and executives had a brainstorming session with Chris Smith a couple of weeks ago at the corporation's training centre near Evesham. Soon after the proceedings kicked off, the receptionist was rung by a man from "BBC corporate accounts" in London.

"Please fax me all the bills at once, so we can pay them," he commanded. "I need everything – bar bills, cost of helicopters for governors, the lot."
As it happened no one had arrived by helicopter. Nor were there any bills, since the centre is itself part of the BBC. Oh, and there is no such department as BBC corporate accounts.

After several of these peremptory requests – "now look, this is the fourth time I've rung: please send me those bills *immediately*" – the BBC's chief PR man decided to check the fax number. Lo and behold, it was located at the *Sun* office.

When challenged by the BBC, the Wapping executive responsible was unabashed. "Oh well, you have to try these things on, don't you?"

AS ANY editor worth his or her salt was quick to recognise, there was only one story last weekend more newsworthy than Jane Proctor being sacked from *Tatler* – the result of the office of fair trading's (OFT) inquiry into predatory pricing at the *Times*.

But what was that result? Well, it varied according to who owned the paper you were reading.

"Yesterday, a huge blow was struck for the freedom and diversity of the British press," trumpeted the *Independent* on its front page. It was apparently "a commercial victory for Mr Murdoch's rivals".

For the *Telegraph* (front page) it was both a "stern warning" and a "final warning", coming as it did after three previous occasions when the OFT decided to, er, do nothing. Whereas this time it really cracked down and "did not refer the matter to the competition commission". And, as the *Guardian* pointed out, Murdoch was "rapped again" when "the OFT did not find NI guilty of predatory pricing per se... nor has the OFT forbidden NI to make price cuts at all". That'll show him.

So was the *Times* repentant? "Times pricing complaint rejected" was its headline. And the *Sun* devoted its entire editorial column to a "rare public comment on our own industry" (see Plugged In, *Eyes passim*), praising the OFT's "common sense". "Everything in this leader column is true," it shrieked, "*And our rivals damn well know it*".

THE *SUN*'s Jane Moore has no time for those who sneer when a woman enters into a loving relationship with a man some years her junior, as in the case of comedienne Caroline Quentin.

"Now they've gone public... let's hope their love is strong... because it will have to endure endless stereotypical comments about cradle-snatching and toyboys," wrote la Moore on page four of the *Sun* on 12 May.

An exclusive by Rav Singh and Thomas Whitaker on the same page thoughtfully illustrated her point: "Pregnant Caroline Quentin yesterday admitted her toyboy lover Sam Farmer is the father of her baby... Caroline is the latest in a long line of celebrities who have taken up with a toyboy."

HOW THEY ARE RELATED

HATS off to the Sunday Times Style section for its passionate devotion to family values.

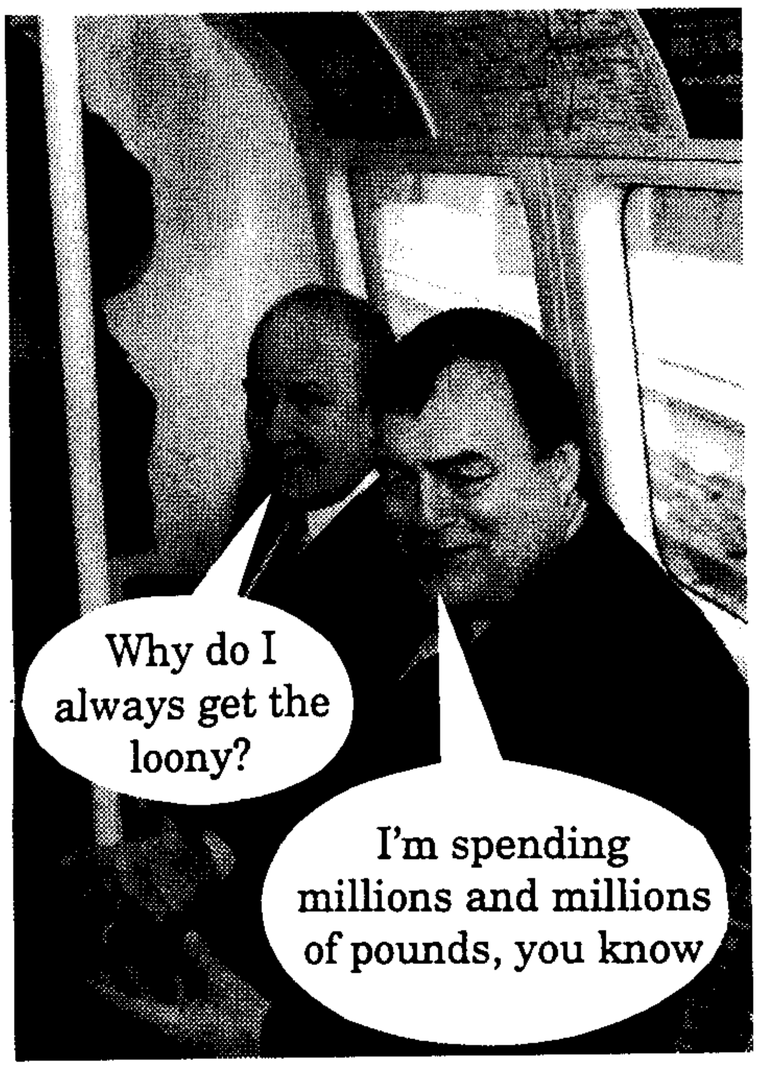
On 16 May it carried a long restaurant review by India Knight, assessing the cuisine at a Glasgow eaterie. ("The dining room here is a no-smoking zone, which is a slight bore... We repaired to the bar for another cigarette...") Oddly enough, India Knight is the (soon to be ex-) wife of Jeremy Langmead, editor of the Style section and mother of his two children.

The next article was a three-page feature about the designer Sabiha Malik. "She has spent weeks designing the perfect soup ladle, christening spoon, or, as at the moment, a series of beautiful semi-precious rings and a range of silver objects," it drooled, helpfully appending the address and phone number of her company for anyone looking for the perfect soup ladle. There were also seven colour photos of her swanky apartment which, it revealed, she is hoping to sell soon. Amid all this puffery, there was no room to mention that Sabiha Malik is India Knight's mum and thus the mother-in-law of Jeremy Langmead.

Meanwhile, what of India Knight's stepfather, Andrew Knight? By yet another coincidence, he is a director of Times Newspapers Holdings and the News Corporation Ltd, parent companies of, er, the *Sunday Times*.

"I started off with five swift ones at the Hog's Head followed by another six pints at the Swan Inn, then on to the Boar for er... three pints and a double whisky before moving to the er... mmm... damn, where did I go then..."

JUBILEE LINE SHOCK



BOMB SUPRISE

WITH the memory of a goldfish, defence correspondents went into this war with the same boyish awe for military technology and jargon as in previous conflicts: Precision, Stealth, Surgical Strikes, etc etc. One reason for this myopia is that the media start every war as if there had been no previous experience. Yet the cock-ups in the Balkans are hardly unprecedented, as a glance at the recent record shows:

Bombing embassies. When Ronald Reagan bombed Libya in 1986, US warplanes hit the Tripoli embassies of France, Romania and Switzerland. Before that, during the Vietnam war, the French embassy in Hanoi was hit, killing the *charge d'affaires.*

Bombing the wrong target. On 3 May the Clinton administration unfroze the bank account of the Saudi owner of the Sudan pharmaceutical company that was destroyed by cruise missiles last August. Saleh Idris took out a lawsuit claiming that the freezing of his assets was illegal. The Americans, unable to produce any real evidence linking him to Osama Bin Laden, backed down.

Using the wrong map. In February 1998 a US marine corps jet cut through the wires of an Italian cable car, consigning 20 people to their doom. The pilot was hurried out of the country before he could face manslaughter charges, to the fury of the Italians. He did face a military court in the US, but his defence was that his maps didn't show the cable cars.

Wrong rockets. Some commentators tried to suggest that Nato's anti-radar rocket which hit Bulgaria had somehow been "seduced" away by the cunning Serbs. No such complicated explanation is necessary. In April, a $250m Lockheed Titan rocket launched a satellite into the wrong orbit. Then a Boeing Delta III failed to launch. Last August another Delta III blew up 71 seconds after lift-off, whereupon a civilian Lockheed Athena II was launched – and promptly vanished. Following these disasters the entire US military satellite launch programme has been suspended pending investigations.

The B-2. The Chinese embassy was probably taken out by a B-2 "stealth" bomber, the famous plane which is supposed to make up for its incredible cost – $2bn a go – by flying alone, thus saving money and putting fewer airmen at risk. To quote the Northrop hype, "its stealthy characteristic means that B-2s do not need an armada of support aircraft". In fact, terrified by the possibility that one will be shot down, the Americans are actually sending the plane out with an escort of 14 other aircraft and around 85 crew.

The next mistake? As supplies of cruise missiles run low, the Pentagon has given Boeing a $41m contract to convert nuclear-armed missiles into the non-nuclear version, to be launched from B-52s into Yugoslavia. Will they remember to take off all the old warheads? Fingers crossed...

HACKWATCH

Big News, Small World

ON 7 February this year, the *News of the World* alerted its readers to a terrifying totalitarian threat: "Straw wants tough new law to gag press and curb your freedom. THEY WANT TO KEEP YOU IN THE DARK."

A thunderous two-page editorial (charmingly labelled "exclusive") warned that under Jack Straw's new youth justice and criminal evidence bill, newspapers would be forbidden to name anyone under the age of 18 who has any connection with a criminal offence. "We English editors would be dragged before the courts to face severe penalties for telling you what you need to know," it wailed.

What *do* readers of the *Screws* need to know? Here are a few examples...

7 February: "*EastEnders* Sid Cheats Lapdancers." "*Blind Date* Hunk Gives Bar Brawler One in the Kisser." "Page 3 Girl Peels Off in Jail Cell for Bananas and Vodka." "Porn Star Got Into Sophie's Knickers." Oh, and there's a "wide-ranging *News of the World* probe" into the "secret world of couples hooked on threesome loving". By day these people look like devoted, respectable couples; by night, however, they "descend into depravity" by enjoying "secret, wanton sex lives that would stun their sedate circle of friends".

28 February: Sex-starved women are paying up to £1,500 to be bedded by strangers in bizarre therapy sessions organised by "kinky couple" Jane and David Brown. "This is prostitution dressed up as sex therapy," rages the *Screws* medical expert, Dr Hilary Jones. "Patients with sex problems should consult their GP."

7 March: Stunning musician Kiria Ceinwen reveals that her idea of fun is to wriggle into skintight rubber, then whip submissive men into a frenzy with her riding crop. The *News of the Screws* is amazed. "What makes ordinary young people seek thrills in fetish clubs?" it wonders. "What makes so many have sex in public, or join in groping orgies?"

Answer comes there none. But readers are advised to "judge the dangers for yourselves" by studying a photo of the 20-year-old beauty in her red latex dress and black stockings.

14 March: Telly beauty Amanda Redman has sent her toyboy back to his mum. Hunky Oliver Boot, 20, is said to be distraught.

28 March: In a major "exclusive", *Screws* hackette Maria Jaynes tells how she was propositioned by top TV weatherman Francis Wilson. "It was my warm front that seemed to interest him," she discloses. Elsewhere the paper reveals that blind-date love rat Greg Cordell "has been sneaking off for sex with a secret mistress".

4 April: An upper-class girlfriend of Princess Anne "shared four-in-a-bed sex and cocaine orgies with a drug baron". According to the *Screws*, the woman "romped" and "cavorted" in a flat in London's posh Chelsea.

11 April: A special investigation discovers that bored executives sometimes visit brothels while they are away on business. "A lot of punters come here off the M6," a prostitute in Carlisle tells the paper's undercover reporter, adding that prostitutes can also be found in Blackpool and Leicester. The *Screws* finds this "astonishing".

18 April: A respected multi-millionaire company chairman "has set up a love-nest with a sex-mad, bondage-loving sculptress nearly 30 years his junior". The mistress, a Puerto Rican called Scheherazade, informs the paper that "I put on a uniform and he spanks my bare bottom. That really excites him and me."

25 April: Hold the front page: a "top BBC star" has been seen snorting cocaine. He turns out to be Radio 2 disc jockey Johnnie Walker. "Our bombshell revelations will shatter the BBC hierarchy," the *Screws* predicts.

2 May: Exclusive photos: "Wild Danniella Westbrook's pantomime shame is revealed by these pictures — showing her in a torrid tangle with her beefy *Beauty and the Beast* co-star." Readers are duly treated to photos of "the lust-crazed pair" canoodling and romping. There is also news of "lust-crazed footballer" Stan Collymore, who has recently "enjoyed a series of three-in-a-bed sex romps".

9 May: A desperate oddjob man is taking a blonde aristocrat to court because "he says she drags him off for sex each time he asks her to pay his bills". The paper also reveals that, a mere nine years ago, All Saints pop beauty Natalie Appleton "made love to a 19-stone man mountain over the boot of a groaning sports car then cheated on him with his best pal".

16 May: Shock, horror: film industry PR man takes cocaine. Since the man in question is Tom Parker-Bowles, 24, the news merits no fewer than five pages, plus a stern editorial reminding us of why the *Screws* has to print this stuff. As the son of the mistress to the Prince of Wales, Tom has "a great responsibility, and the duty, as a role model for all young people... That is why we make an example today of young Parker-Bowles."

23 May: Now it's the turn of England rugby captain Lawrence Dallaglio, who has taken drugs and "enjoyed drunken romps with vice girls" — as he confessed to "astonished *News of the World* investigators". Quite why it should be so astonishing to find a rugby player caught up in a tabloid scandal — bearing in mind the record of his predecessor, Will Carling — is not explained. But once again the *Screws* ascends its editorial pulpit, announcing that it will continue to expose men such as Tom Parker-Bowles and Dallaglio for as long as "role models of our age shame their country and themselves".

To prove the point there's a two-page spread naming and shaming four women who have cheated on their partners: raunchy secretary Natasha Smith, clubber Clare Shaw, stunning singer Sarah Wilson — and horsey Shelley Harris, who "felt her jodhpurs stretch seductively over her thighs as she slid from her saddle in a forest clearing. She knew her hunky riding partner was watching every ripple..." Shelley promises that she'll never do it again: "It's horrible feeling guilty." Too late: no guilty deed goes unpunished. For, as the paper's editorial warns, "the *News of the World* will never let up in its investigations".

HUMBUG SPECIAL

IN February the *News of the Screws* ran a two-page shock-horror exposé of "warped hypnotist" Terry Foster, who turns "his unsuspecting audience into writhing sex-crazed zombies".

As the *Screws* revealed: "He cashes in on degradation with a range of 'hypnotic' games... Girls contort their bodies in apparent ecstasy after being convinced that a CHAIR can give them a shuddering orgasm." Even more shockingly, the "vile mind-bender" showed "not a shred of remorse" when challenged by the *Screws* about his "sick" and "twisted" stunts.

Three months on, the *News of the Screws* is now urging its readers to buy a "hilarious new video" in which hypnotist Barrie McCann "turns his talents to making people do the most outrageous things. Like making two hunky blokes believe each other was their gorgeous new bride. Or convincing an innocent leggy lovely that she is having the greatest sexual experience of her life. If you've ever wondered exactly how far people will go in losing their inhibitions, then you'll find the answer... And all at a mesmerising bargain price – thanks to your *News of the World.*"

"Actually, madam, I can recommend everything"

IN THE TEAROOM

A QUIET coup has taken place in Britain during the past few months which accounts for the increasingly rightwing flavour of recent legislation.

"New" Labour's victory in 1997 was not only a defeat for the Tories, but an even greater defeat for the civil service. The new boys and girls in Number Ten were determined they would run the country themselves. And so they did.

But not even chief-of-staff Jonathan Powell's crisply efficient team of fixers can run a country and fight a war at the same time. This has allowed the Whitehall mandarins under the cabinet secretary Sir Richard Wilson to sneak back in and seize the levers of power.

Just as Bill Clinton's famous "I never inhaled" defence could only have been conceived by a lawyer, so Alistair Darling's weaselly insistence that incapacity benefit is an "income replacement" (and so should not be given to unemployed people who have no income to replace) could only have been drafted by an official. And certainly nothing less than a Sir Humphrey in full fig could have persuaded a minister as senior as Jack Straw to undergo the humiliation of eating his own words on the right to trial by jury.

The sticky fingerprints of the permanent secretaries can be found all over the asylum bill – which contains clauses so illiberal even Michael Howard could not have stomached them – and on the new "freedom lite" draft of the freedom of information bill, the proposal that struck terror into bureaucratic hearts when "new" Labour first came in.

The mechanism that has allowed Sir Richard to take over the running of the country while the prime minister gallivants about Europe is the new, gleaming cabinet office machine. This is supposed to be under the political control of the "Enforcer", Dandy Jack Cunningham. But Dandy Jack has proved unable to enforce his way out of a paper bag and, a prisoner of his officials, is reduced to spouting breathtakingly unpopular PR plugs for Monsanto. No surprise that policy papers that go into the cabinet office dripping with idealism, but return starchily authoritarian, are said by ministers' special advisers to have been "genetically modified".

'Urquhart'

JUST FANCY THAT!

THE department for education and employment (DfEE) was quick to point out that it would not tolerate lapses in standards in Labour's favourite London borough.

As a press release from the DfEE website said "Morris tells Islington To Act Decisively And Urgently To End Catalogue Of Educatoinal Failure".

THE "iron chancellor" Gordon Brown, his leadership ambitions undimmed, has been forcing others to carry the can for the nasty medicine he is repeatedly administering to the poor old Labour party.

One of Dr Brown's earlier prescriptions was his plan to cut benefit to single mothers, a policy so unpopular it provoked a major rebellion in the usually supine parliamentary Labour party. Although Brown was happy to engage in some private arm twisting to force the patients to swallow his ghastly concoction, the miserable job of defending the policy in public was gifted to the hapless Harriet Harman, who was obliged to fall upon her sword shortly afterwards – as was her colleague Frank Field, who recognised a quack doctor when he saw one and said so.

With "welfare reform" being driven by the treasury, it was only a matter of time before Dr Brown concocted something even more unpleasant for his colleagues, this time in the shape of benefit cuts to the disabled. Once again the iron chancellor has kept a munificently low profile, allowing all the kudos to descend upon the shoulders of the charmless Alistair Darling. Oh, and the guileless prime minister too. For Dr Brown is well aware that Mr Tony actually believes in Bill Clinton's soundbite, "a hand up, not a hand out", and that his dear friend will lose no opportunity to argue the case for benefit cuts in the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* while he, Gordon, maintains a healthy silence.

With backbench rebellions growing in size as the salami slicing of benefits is ratcheted up, Dr Gordon may soon be obliged to dump Mr Tony in it, claiming that he was only "following orders". As he continues to do so each time he delves ever deeper into the contingency fund for the Balkans war, a subject about which Dr Brown appears to have taken a vow of Trappist silence, just in case that too should go pear shaped.

THE chancellor's reward for seeing off Alex Salmond in the Scottish parliament elections was the dumping of Helen "balls in one hand, bollocks in the other" Liddell, and her replacement with Radovan Karadzic's one-time guest John Reid, who becomes the secretary of state for Scotland.

But the sudden death of junior foreign office minister Derek Fatchett has enabled the prime minister to appoint one of his trustees to the only department that has so far resisted the Blairite tide – the FCO. With key Blairites in every ministry – including the treasury – the obvious choice for Fatchett's replacement was Derry Irvine's trusted deputy, Geoff Hoon. Hoon may find some difficulty in placing Pristina on the map, but he has no difficulty placing his loyalty with Tony, rather than Robin.

DEREK FATCHETT's death has prompted a sordid scramble for the rock solid Labour seat of Leeds Central, with family members distressed that they had been canvassed for support by "new" Labour wannabes within days.

As suspicions grew that the strife-torn Leeds party would only have a walk-on roll in selecting a successor, a spokesman from Number Ten tried to disabuse a reporter from the *Times* of any notion of control freakery. "Downing Street", it was claimed, "had no intention of imposing its wishes" on Leeds

Central. Oh no? A glance at the same report revealed that most of those declaring an interest in standing were employed in, er, Number Ten.

One of those most anxious to dispel any notion that he might be considering "putting himself forward" was the ineptly named Andrew Adonis, who works in the Downing Street policy unit and who, the *Times* claimed, was hoping to stand. On learning that the *Express* had been making inquiries too, a furious Adonis, who manages to combine a rare intellectual genius with a past membership of almost every British political party, unusually engaged the services of a Downing Street press officer to bellow into Tony Bevins' shell-like at the *Express*, denying the *Times* story. Bevins, who had not been party to any of the inquiries and was unaware of the story, told his editor Rosie Boycott, who courageously spiked the story.

JAMES STRACHAN, chief executive of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), made an impassioned plea to MPs to vote with their consciences, not the government, on the welfare reform bill last week.

"I very much hope that MPs put the needs of their current and future disabled constituents first when they vote," he said, announcing that the RNID was joining many other disability organisations in resigning from the government's disability benefits forum in protest.

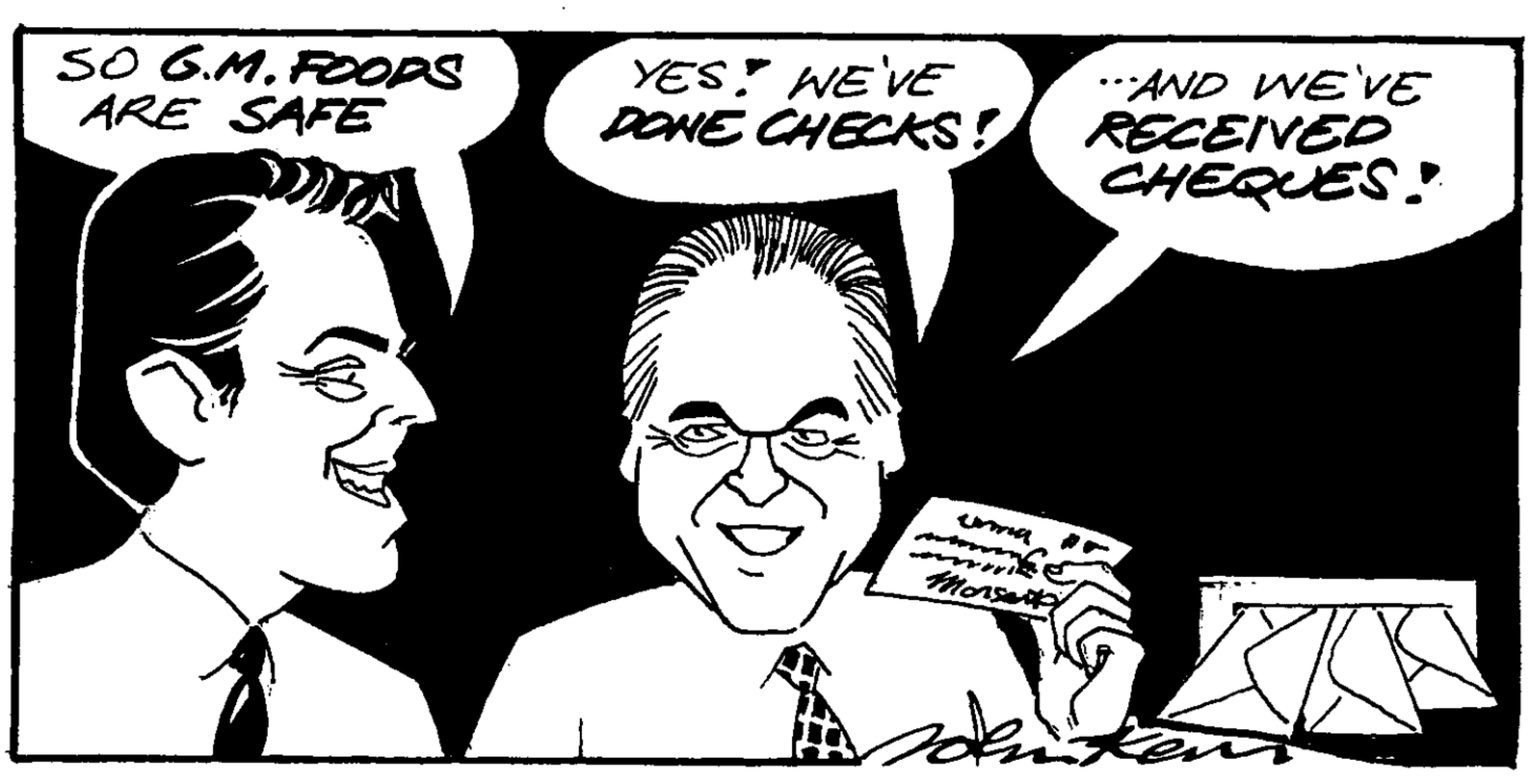
He might have taken for granted the support of RNID trustee Tom Levitt, the Labour MP for High Peak. But although 65 Labour MPs voted against the bill's proposed cuts in incapacity benefit, Levitt, who also sits on the all-party groups on charities and disablement, was not among them.

"WEE" Ernie Ross might have been expected to show some humility after he was rumbled for leaking the "Arms to Africa" report by the foreign affairs select committee to Robin Cook, despite being a member of the committee himself. But not a bit of it.

"Wee" Ernie is no longer on the committee, and so has more time to be a full time nark. Rebel Labour MPs who recently met with groups opposed to the government's proposed asylum bill were surprised to discover he had developed a sudden and hitherto unknown interest in the welfare of asylum seekers, despite representing Dundee East, a constituency with probably the smallest number of asylum seekers in the country.

Their joy soon evaporated when they discovered that Ernie had pitifully little to say about the injustices in Jack Straw's bill, and that he made a quick exit from the meeting as proceedings drew to a close – once it had been agreed to back a proposed amendment to the bill by Labour backbencher Neil Gerrard.

On leaving the meeting Gerrard was himself approached by two Labour whips demanding to know "on whose authority" he was proposing to put down his amendment. Unaccountably the whips appeared to enjoy a good deal of information about the meeting that had ended barely minutes earlier. As a result "wee" Ernie is now being known affectionately as "the plumber" – because, in the words of one of them, "Ernie fixes leaks".



CALDERDALE's long-awaited "hospital for the millennium" – not due to open until 2001 – is now under construction on the old Halifax General Hospital site.

Hailed by health secretary Frank Dobson as a triumph for the private finance initiative (PFI), the Tory enterprise so warmly embraced by "new" Labour, he strangely failed to note that it will provide only 569 beds. That is 71 short of the number needed in the area at the peak of demand last year.

Even then consultants, under management pressure, were masking real requirement by slashing hospital stays and axing non-urgent operations. That may have kept bed-occupancy down in the short term, but what it has triggered is a huge increase (59 percent) in the number of patients having to be readmitted within six weeks of discharge. In 1996 there were 1,721 readmissions. Last year 2,775.

As always it is the elderly who suffer most with more than one in seven caught in the "revolving door".

"NEW" Labour's answer to Dale Winton, Enfield's Stephen Twigg, is beginning to grate with the horny-handed sons of toil who still populate Labour's backbenches.

"Dale's" famous election victory over the evil Michael Portillo prevented tongues from wagging earlier, but his decision to join the National Liberal Club has infuriated the old guard, who quite unreasonably believe that Dale prefers the company of Liberal Democrats to them.

"Dale's" recent Common's "performances" have only added grist to the mill. During the Kosovo debate his thoughtful contribution took the form of infantile sniggering with equally pea-brained colleagues, while the angst ridden debate on welfare reform elicited a yawn so large it was visible from the public gallery.

"Dale" had better watch his step or prepare for a future presenting TV's *Shop 'til you Drop.*

WELSH LEAKS

THROUGH gritted teeth Alun Michael, Labour "prime minister" of Wales, has agreed to the appointment of Welsh nationalist peer Lord Elis-Thomas as "presiding officer" (speaker) of the Welsh assembly.

There's little love lost between the two because the glib lord makes the dull Michael look even greyer than his suits. But pragmatism ruled the day.

The lord had been assured of the job by Michael's predecessor Ron Davies; and while Michael would have liked another candidate and was looking for one, his own appointment as "PM" could not be assured without the support of Dafydd Wigley, leader of Plaid Cymru, and his nationalist assembly members.

Wigley and Lord Elis Thomas of course have long been at loggerheads and Wigley was anxious not to have his rival cluttering up the nationalist benches. And so a deal was done.

With Labour holding only 28 of the 60 seats, Michael needed the support of the 17-strong nationalist block – and he got it. Thus he was elected unopposed and Wigley saw Elis-Thomas nodded upstairs into the £68,000-a-year job where neutrality is a *sine qua non.*

Meanwhile Michael's minority Labour cabinet has caused much merriment, looking as it does more like an odd sock drawer (monoglot English speaker Tom Middlehurst in charge of Welsh language policy; vegetarian Christine Gwyther looking after agriculture, etc). Apart from Rhodri Morgan, his economics minister, the rest are simply Blairite clones and card-carrying members of "new" Labour's "new" Taffia.

Rosemary Butler and Edwina Hart sit together on the Broadcasting Council for Wales, in charge of BBC Wales; and Edwina Hart once worked for Chwarae Teg, a voluntary organisation, where Jane Hutt, another member, is a director. Peter Law and Jane Hutt have experience as directors of NHS trusts, while Peter Law is also a justice of the peace, as is Alun Michael.

Andrew Davies, meanwhile, business manager or "leader of the house", is an ex-political lobbyist with Welsh Context (see *Eyes passim*) and a member of the Wales Labour party's executive where he has worked closely with Michael putting together a "Welsh" cabinet of, er, Blairite clones.

NOOKS and CORNERS

TALK of poacher turning gamekeeper. No Conservative government would have dared to do this, but "new" Labour has decided that the first chairman of the proposed new quango for good modern architecture intended to replace the poor old Royal Fine Art Commission — now to be called the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment — is not to be Deyan Sudjic or Paul Finch or any other architectural journalist or editor or pundit or hack or historian or critic or promoter, as expected, but Mr Stuart Lipton.

But the qualifications of Mr Lipton, 56, to be Britain's "architecture champion" are impeccable: he is a member of the (doomed) Royal Fine Art Commission; he is a trustee of the Architecture Foundation; above all, he is a close friend and client of My Lord Rogers of Riverside (most important, that); and he was the developer of the Sackler Galleries at the Royal Academy designed by our own Sir Norman Foster. Client? Developer? Yes, you see, Stuart Lipton has the best possible qualification for advising on the commissioning of new architecture under "new" Labour: he is a successful *property developer.*

Lipton has been a property developer since the late 1960s, when he was involved with, er, improving Covent Garden. He has been responsible for more than 1.15 million square feet of development. Gosh. His company is called Stanhope but it wasn't always called that as there have been, um, a few hiccups along the way.

Square footage is all very well, but does he care deeply and passionately about Good Modern Architecture? Well, of course. He was responsible for the High Tech Stockley Park business park near Heathrow with buildings by... Foster & Partners, while more recently he has replaced Terry Farrell as masterplanner for the redevelopment of the old London Transport bus works in Chiswick with, yes, Richard Rogers. They go back a long way, you see: back in the early 1980s Lipton showed he was on the side of the great and the good by commissioning Richard Rogers to redevelop the Coin Street area. Unfortunately, the people of Waterloo did not know what was good for them and the scheme foundered — despite legal advice from another useful friend, Derry Irvine — yes, the future lord chancellor.

"I've been doing this for 20 years; trying to produce good work," *Building Design* reports Mr Lipton as saying; "It's just a natural extension of what I do." And, as we all know, if what Mr Lipton does is commission High Tech buildings by Norman Foster and Richard Rogers and their acolytes, he cannot fail to produce good work.

So, can we look forward to the Commission for Architecture making sure that Britain remains the admiration of the world by building yet more masterpieces by Richard Rogers and Norman Foster? No, that would be unfair. Mr Lipton's tastes are wider. For instance, at the beginning of the Broadgate development at Liverpool Street, he asked Arup Associates to do some buildings, and then used the slick American architects, Skidmore Owings & Merrill, to do the bigger ones. And then there was the occasion when he asked Leon Krier, the committed Classicist who advised the Prince of Wales on Poundbury, to prepare a masterplan for the redevelopment of Spitalfields Market — although the mean-minded and cynical suggest that that was just a spoiling operation to make sure that nearby Broadgate was finished and let without competition. More recently, Stanhope was responsible for Beaufort House in the City, a peculiarly repulsive building by Renton Howard Wood Levine. There's pluralism for you.

Let us look on the bright side of this triumph of "new" Labour cronyism. At least Mr Lipton believes in employing architects whereas the last Conservative government was happy to encourage Design 'n' Build to put up any old rubbish. He has occasionally appeared in this column (*Eyes passim*) — but principally I can only recall the sudden demolition of Georgian houses at the start of the Broadgate development. And there are occasions, as even I will admit, when a building designed by an architect employed by Lord Rogers of Riverside might put up something better than the mediocrity usually favoured by government departments and local authorities.

On reflection, though, this is not so much poacher turned gamekeeper as poacher turned poacher. Our "architecture champion" will get a salary of £30,000 for two days' championing a week, leaving three days to carry on being a successful property developer. New Labour it certainly is. Come back My Lord St John of Fawsley — all is forgiven. Almost.

'Piloti'

THE CONSERVATIVES – REMEMBER THEM?

THE costs of Neil Hamilton's attempt to sue Mohamed Fayed for libel are evidently biting. At the end of the recent launch of Hamilton's new website, held at Politico's Bookshop in Westminster, Christine Hamilton was heard to ask Politico's owner Iain Dale if there was "anywhere cheap to eat nearby".

Earlier Christine played the role of perfect hostess by circulating through the shop with a platter of smoked salmon dainties. An improvement, at least, on her practice of locking tonsils with young Conservatives...

The atmosphere was made even more bizarre when the black fox-hunting hero Derek Laud appeared with Chris Eubank in tow. Neil Hamilton, surprised but gratified, admitted: "I've never met Eubank but it's certainly a comfort to have him here." This provoked understanding nods from such luminaries as Anthony Sheldon of the Adam Smith Institute (sporting a Serbian bullseye badge), George Gardiner and fellow ex-MP, Piers Merchant.

When Hamilton finally made his speech, he regaled the assembled "crowd" with the tale of his recent conversation with Fayed on a Talk Radio show. Apparently, Hamilton was being driven to Oxford by Christine and phoned in as "Neil from Staffordshire". This was received with guffaws from Hamiltonian cheerleader Gyles Brandreth. In the course of this wit-laden speech, Hamilton asserted that his story could now be read free of the "distortions produced by the refracting prism of journalistic prejudice and straight from the horse's mouth". The uncharitable might wonder if this was a hint at who the true author of the website is.

'Backbiter'

■ TUITION

RAISE YOUR CHILDS STANDARD'S In English. Ages 6 to 12.

Shields Gazette

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

EUROPEAN union officials love directives – no matter how old. Now they are using one dating from 1965 as a way to get their hands on the health food sector.

Thus a 30-year-old bit of Euro-legalese now means that the Medicines Control Agency will be regulating what consumers in Britain want to buy in terms of alternative health products.

Unsurprisingly a lot of them are furious and will be petitioning the new MEPs to *do* something about the officials' meddling.

"Would you say NATO is doing an excellent job, a good job, or a poor job?"

TV

Crimewatch UK (BBC1)

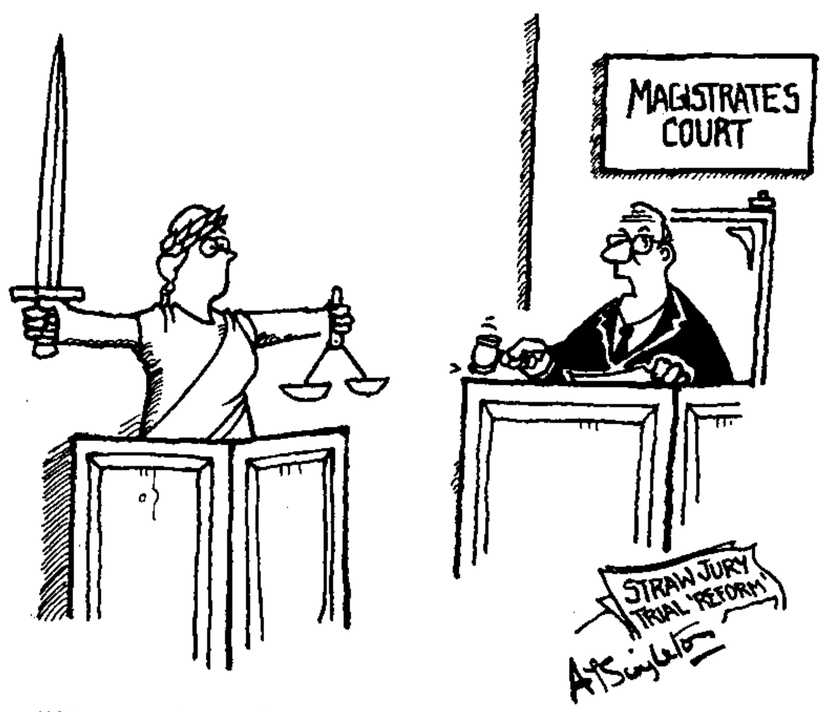
BECAUSE America has been at heart a stranger nation — and its institutions have been far more willing to admit cameras — this country has never had a moment of heightened intensity to match, say, the OJ Simpson trial or President Clinton's videotaped evidence: stretches of television where fact and fiction merge and it is hard to believe that you are really seeing what is on the screen. But, with the May edition of Crimewatch UK, British viewers got their own pinch-me programme.

Nick Ross, a co-host unexpectedly going solo, thankfully chose the word "surreal" rather than "ironic" to describe the experience of fronting a *Crimewatch* edition devoted to the murder of his fellow presenter, Jill Dando. And surreal was the word. Apart from an edition of the football programme *The Big Match* when presenter Jimmy Hill was called in as replacement referee during the featured game, there has never been a programme forced in on itself to this degree.

The fear in advance had been that the problem would be the tone. But, in fact, there was none of the sickly subjectivity which marred news coverage by Dando's BBC colleagues on the day of her death. Ross was, if anything, slightly more dispassionate than he sometimes is when describing the murders of the unknown. The programme also, unlike the newspapers, stuck firmly to evidence rather than motive. The difficulty was an unexpected one: that investigation of this murder close to home undermined the assumptions on which *Crimewatch UK* rests. As Corporal Jones so memorably observed in a different context: "They don't like it up 'em!"

The most important weakness revealed in the *Crimewatch* style concerns the lurid reconstructions of the crimes. Although the May edition was almost wholly devoted to Dando, a few other cases were reconstructed. In one of these — a rape case — an actress playing the victim was followed to her car with the usual ominous camera angles, thumping music and terrified scream. Yet, in the Dando segment, only the alleged suspects were recreated. The crime itself was not staged and no actress played Dando.

In a statement *Crimewatch* explained that this was because



"Possession of an offensive weapon and suspected drug dealing — six months!"

"everyone knows what Jill Dando looks like". Ah, so the show's lurid reconstructions are intended to help us to identify the victim, are they? In fact it was clear that the decision was made because people who had known or worked with Dando would have found a drama-doc version of the homicide too upsetting. It must be hoped that the series draws the general lesson from this for its future reconstructions. It was clear that the viewer lost nothing at all from not seeing the assault.

In other ways, though, the Dando edition less helpfully questioned the show's approach. For example, the main justification for *Crimewatch* as a show is that publicity solves crimes. Most of the murders featured in the series have struggled to attract any serious newspaper attention. Not so in this case, where the viewer had the odd experience of thinking: ah, we haven't heard about the traffic warden before.

But can we really believe that someone who didn't remember they'd been on the Crucial Bus or in the Vital Road until they saw the May edition of *Crimewatch* is a reliable witness? This would have to be a person who never read newspapers or watched television news and yet was a regular viewer of *Crimewatch*. Such an individual would clearly be suffering from Miss Marple Syndrome, a desperate desire to assist the police in their inquiries.

It has been argued before that, when it tackles particularly shocking crimes, *Crimewatch* increases the risk of unsafe prosecutions through well-meaning false memory — this may have happened in the Lin and Megan Russell murder case — and you could feel the same risk here. But the treatment of a case about which most viewers already knew a huge amount undercut two more of the show's cherished assumptions: the power of eyewitness evidence and the impressive authority of detectives.

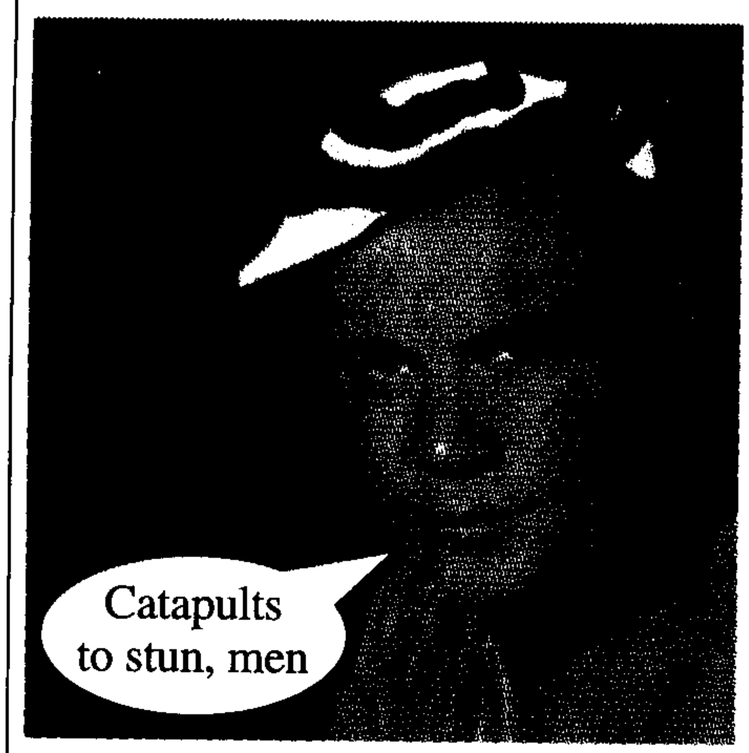
Hamish Campbell, the lead Dando cop, reported sightings of so many apparently different men near the scene — with variations of colour or length of coat and hair — that he was forced to give the impression of a vast Oliver Stone-style conspiracy. Because of *Crimewatch*'s reverence for the public, neither he nor Ross was allowed to suggest that the most likely explanation was the unreliability of people's eyes.

And poor old Campbell gave another part of the game away. Usually, watching the detectives on *Crimewatch*, you assume they know pretty much what happened and just need that vital final clue. In this case, where we know so much, it was all too embarrassingly clear that the cops had no idea at all.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Just William Shatner

MEDIA NEWS

BSKYB's decision to give away its digital set-top boxes was hailed as an example of Rupert Murdoch's generosity. The fact that the things don't work very well attracted far less attention.

Throughout the UK subscribers with different makes of TV and varying local geography have all found similar problems: unexpected breaks in transmission, strange lines on screen, an inability to receive channels they've paid for by direct debit, and a total failure by Sky customer service staff to answer the phone when they try to complain.

To take one of the thousands of possible examples, Times media hack Maggie Brown detailed her own plight in her own newspaper (owned by you know who). "I went to BSkyB's free-digital TV launch this week fuming over my latest bill. It contained odd charges... I think early subscribers to Sky Digital (as well as having paid £199.99 for the connection) have been getting a slapdash service.

"Later I got a call from Paul Collis, the new boss of Sky Services, who agrees but says the system was launched before the customer call centres had been properly organised. Now they are crawling with trouble shooters, he says."

A shortage of call centre staff hardly explains why the boxes don't all work properly. On 4 May Scottish Telecom laid off 101 contract call centre operators without prior warning. They had only started work in April when their purpose-built centre opened to handle calls from BSkyB's digital subscribers. The boxes' technical failure bodes ill for Murdoch's plans to introduce banking and shopping services and may well explain the sudden departure of BSkyB's chief executive and the failure of Princess Elisabeth to get his job. If Bill Gates can force a merger between the cable operators, there's every possibility he can break Murdoch and his allies at BT.

THE end may be nigh for many of those "reality" programmes that dominate Sky and ITV peak-time schedules.

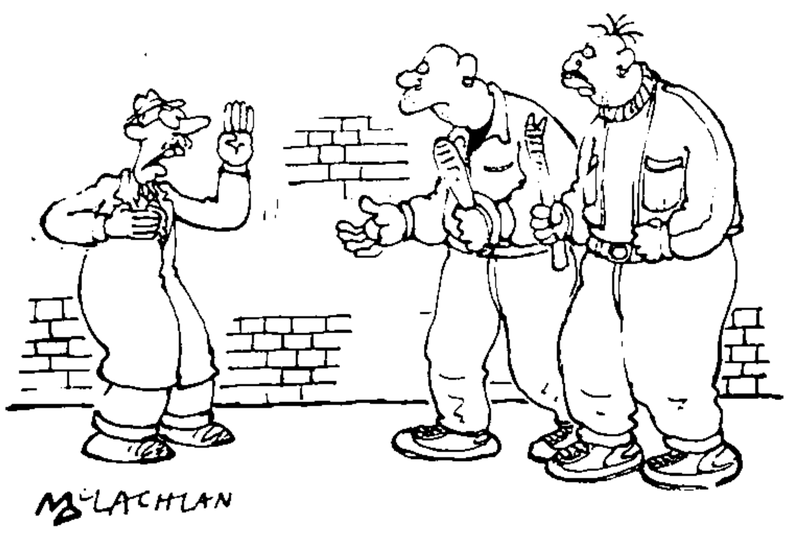
Last year the *Eye* reported the arrest of an actor in Idaho after a flock of flamingos had been let loose on the road and a bout of nude mud wrestling organised on the lawn of a suburban house. These japes had been created for the *World's Nastiest Neighbours* show on Fox-tv (prop. R. Murdoch), the format of which has since been borrowed by both the BBC and ITV. At the time, embarrassed Murdoch executives claimed the arrest was a one-off and denied that their documentaries were routinely staged.

Now, however, the rival Paramount-owned *Inside Edition* has produced evidence that many scenes in tasteful series such as *When Animals Attack, When Good Pets Go Bad, World's Scariest Police Chases, World's Most Shocking Moments* and *Surviving the Moment of Impact* have been completely fabricated.

Highlights among the fakes include a rampaging elephant scene from *When Animals Attack* (complete with masses of fake blood on the "victims"), and an elaborate but totally bogus boat-chase involving drugs smugglers (who turned out to be off-duty policemen paid to act the part) on *World's Wildest Police Videos*. The latter was introduced with the words "what you are about to see in the next 60 minutes is real: real cops, real crooks, real cases... what you see may shock you, frighten you, anger you." But only if you think it's real, presumably.

Fox's executive vice-president Mike Darnell tells the *Washington Post* that such inventions are "extremely rare"; but when asked how many more programmes in this genre the Murdoch empire is planning to make, he boasts "I'll milk it until it dies".

The Independent Television Commission could provide a mercy killing on this side of the Atlantic by ordering Sky and ITV to stop broadcasting these shows – though how Elisabeth Murdoch would fill the resulting gaps in her schedule is anyone's guess.



"I must warn you – I'm an expert in Feng Shui"

FOLLOWING record losses, controllers of BBC television's international news service, the almost viewer-free BBC World, have had to drop the only advert to appear since the channel's ill-conceived launch eight years ago.

Desperate for cash, Aunty's commercial arm BBC Worldwide had scraped the gutter and come up with a deal to plug "the *New York Times* best seller and publishing sensation"... L. Ron Hubbard's classic *What is Scientology?*

Questions are being asked about what brilliant mind decided the champion of dianetics was suitable for a supposedly serious news channel broadcasting around the world. But the ad did at least prove that BBC World has some viewers (they mostly called to complain).

This embarrassing episode could not have come at a worse time for the sinking ship. BBC news supremo Tony Hall came out of hiding a few days ago (following the death threat to him from a crazed Serb who claimed to have killed Jill Dando) to reject the channel's own ludicrous five-year survival plan. The newsroom is now awash with rumours of a merger with the equally diabolical BBC News 24.

CHRISTOPHER WAIN has been touting for business since his retirement last month as the BBC's air and defence correspondent.

He has circulated a wipe-clean laminated calling card detailing his services as a freelance coach. "Clumsy on camera? Unable to find the words for that 15 second soundbite? Don't know how to handle the fast balls when you're on the defensive? Call me", it reads, before listing an impressive array of phone, fax, ISDN, pager and mobile numbers.

Despite a long career resumé ("expert commentary on ... the Lockerbie bombing, Kegworth, TWA 800, the King's Cross & Clapham disasters") Wain does not mention his coverage of the British Airways dirty tricks campaign against Virgin Atlantic. Throughout the coverage of the affair, Wain insisted nothing underhand had occurred — until that is BA paid out £610, 000 to Richard Branson and Virgin Atlantic when Branson took BA to court. There is no reminder of this episode on Wain's shiny new CV— save for a large picture of him standing proudly in front of a fleet of BA's multicoloured, multicultural tailfins.

THE man staging the BBC's Millennium Weekend is approaching his task with a near-religious fervour – and seems to be finding the numbers involved mind-boggling.

As executive producer Giles Oakley wrote recently to his staff: "Most of us already on the team joined because we think this is the most exciting and challenging project we will ever have the privilege to be part of.

"Nothing like this is likely to happen again in our lifetime, possibly ever."

THE aural sculpture by American artist Bill Fontana which pipes sounds of the sea into Trafalgar Square straight from a Spanish beach was commissioned as part of the National Maritime Museum's £20m lottery-funded development.

So too were three unusual works of video installation art produced for the museum in Greenwich by English designer Tony Bannister.

Bannister, who also creates title sequences for the BBC, hoped that projects involving lottery money might be subject to the same code the Beeb applies to subcontractors, which prevents his pieces from being displayed until he has received payment. But no such luck.

When the queen and the Duke of Edinburgh opened the new Maritime Museum on 11 May, the installation art was firmly installed. Bannister meanwhile was still unpaid... and pondering whether working for the museum is itself a bit of a lottery.

Plugged In

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away... so begins the most hotly anticipated movie of all time. *The Phantom Menace* is the first *Star Wars* film for 26 years, and one of three prequels to the iconic trilogy. This special collector's issue is your guide to the new universe.

Introduction to special edition of the Sunday Times magazine (prop: R.Murdoch), entirely devoted to plugging the new Star Wars film from 20th Century Fox (prop: R.Murdoch).

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

NEW OLD SAYINGS

Flattery will get you knitwear

NICK ROSS's appeal on Crimewatch last week for Range Rover owners who were in the vicinity of Jill Dando's Fulham home on the day of her murder to come forward has elicited several responses.

One four-wheel drive owner whom police can rule out of their inquiries, however, is the head of BBC news and current affairs, Tony Hall. In the climate of fear that arose at the Beeb after allegations that a Serbian gunman was responsible for Dando's death, Hall badgered the corporation to upgrade his chauffeur-driven Lexus to a "much safer" £50,000 top-of-the-Range Rover.

OPERA NEWS

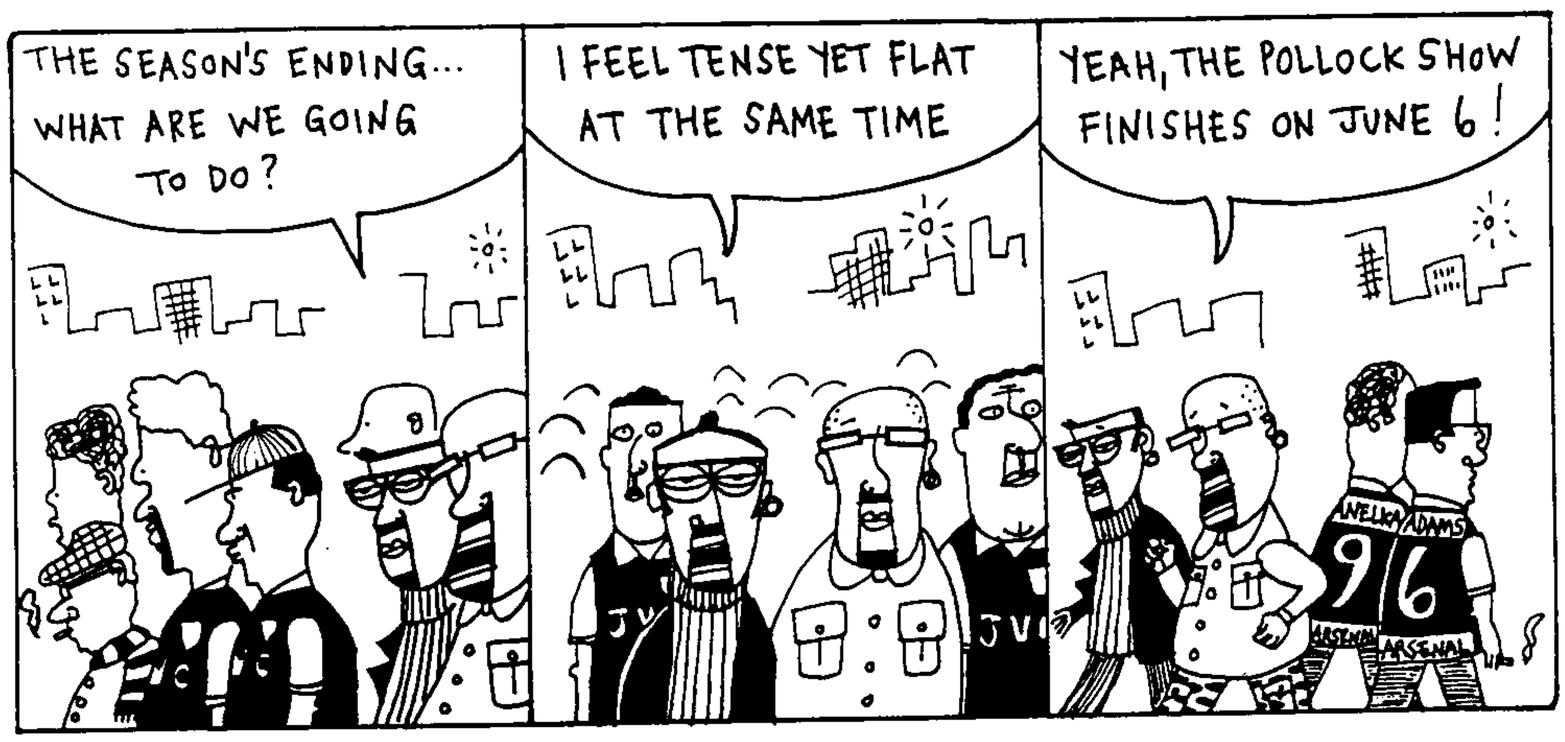
NEVER let it be said that BBC coverage of the arts is dumbing down. Why, only last week it ran a live simulcast of Handel's *Semele* on BBC2 and Radio 3.

Helpfully the *Radio Times* provided a summary of the plot detailing how "Jupiter has the hots for the mortal Semele", but his wife Juno "says to herself: don't get mad, get even".

This, combined with the promise of "some nudity", probably had scores of 15-24 year olds glued to the screen. But if the BBC is going to dumb down, it could at least get the patter right – unless Dr Peter Jones was offering a new interpretation in his half-time notes when he spoke of Jupiter approaching Semele for a bit of "argy-bargy" rather than "rumpy-pumpy".

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER



DOING THE ROUNDS

Hammersmith Hospital whitewash

IS whistleblowing worth it? Not according to many of the 70 people who were brave enough to give evidence to an independent external review into the imaging (x-ray) department at Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust.

The review, published last month, addresses many of the staff's concerns about the quality of management and patient care. But the remarks are sandwiched between incongruously positive statements that have allowed trust managers to paint a glowing picture in their press release. For past and present employees, many problems remain unresolved.

The review was commissioned in December 1998 by Dr Maureen Dalziel, regional director of public health at North Thames NHS executive. Her promise that it would be "wide-ranging" and "embrace all relevant issues" has not been fulfilled. As one consultant observed: "It is not possible to deduce the background or the relationships between the different events from information in the report, nor whether senior consultants who were the subject of disciplinary action were responsible for widespread shortcomings or not."

Not, is the answer.

Relations between Prof Peter Dawson and the departmental head, Prof D.J. Allison, became strained when Dawson alerted colleagues of the dangers to the public of having inexperienced junior radiologists on call who were covered by some consultants who themselves did insufficient interventional radiology to obtain or maintain the necessary skills.

Dawson later complained that two of his staff bank accounts and a Medical Research Council grant were raided without his knowledge and called for an inquiry into financial controls within the department and Imperial College School of Medicine. Allison then instituted disciplinary procedures against Dawson, which led to his suspension on the flimsy grounds that he had "damaged the reputation of ICSM". This was intolerable to Dawson, who resigned with a very large financial settlement.

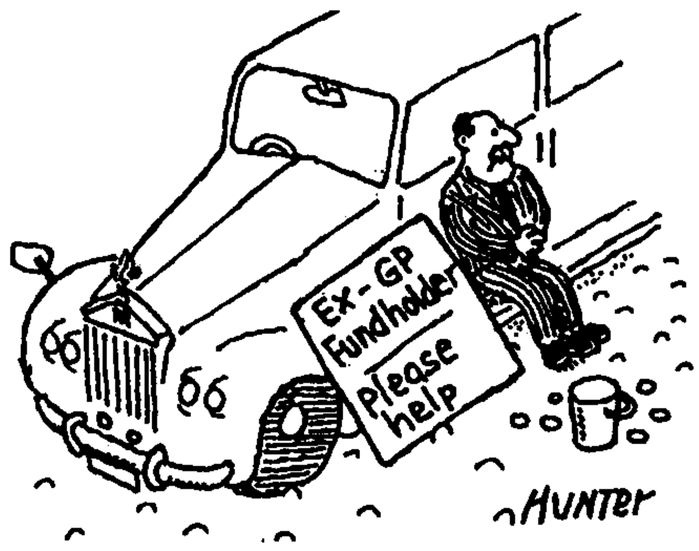
Another consultant, Walter Curati, also raised concerns about the safety of the on-call service and was sent on "gardening leave" while his own competence was checked out.

These problems date back to at least 1992, when the Royal College of Radiologists sent two investigators to the Hammersmith to interview the registrars. Their report criticised some aspects of junior doctor training and did not go down well with Allison.

A previous registrar who gave evidence to the review wrote: "I was summoned to Allison's office to discuss the report. Following a lecture on its shortcomings, it was suggested that I sign a letter that Allison was to compose to the college claiming the report was incorrect and did not adequately reflect the views of the registrars in training. At the time I felt this was untrue and the college report was a fair reflection... As such I did not feel in a position to sign this letter."

Allison's behaviour was later brought up anonymously at the junior forum of the Royal College of Radiologists and full details were passed on in confidence to the president, Sir Christopher Payne, and later to Prof Stuart Field. Shortly afterwards, the registrar was again summoned to Allison's office. "I was told that my behaviour was unacceptable and that if I stuck my head above the parapet I should expect to deal with the consequences." The registrar felt he could no longer continue on the Hammersmith training scheme and left under royal college protection.

M.D. has received many other criticisms of Allison's management style from review witnesses, yet none of these feature in the final report. However, the review heard critical to supportive evidence of the unit in a ratio of 9:1 and "a great number of things" gave "great cause for concern".

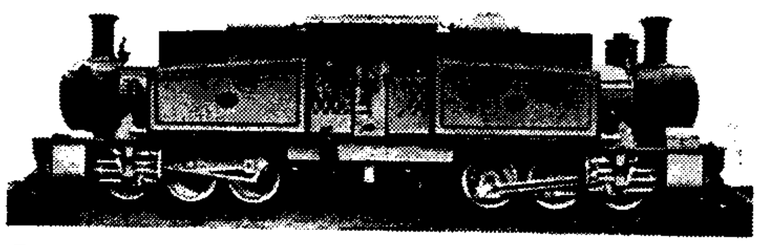


Many of these issues never reached the final report, but those that did include prolonged reporting times, unreported films, inadequate scheduling and reporting of cancer patients' studies, poor provision of neonatal radiography, problems with on-call rotas, inadequate provision for acute MRI scans and problems with transcription and verification of reports.

Some major management deficiencies were identified (remoteness, lack of involvement in clinical work, intractable inter-departmental problems, lack of consultant job plans and poor staff morale); but despite this catalogue of clinical and management problems, the review reached the staggering conclusion that the department "is providing an excellent clinical service to patients" — without any audit evidence whatsoever.

Without audit, there is no evidence of anything, good or bad, and so this conclusion is virtually meaningless. But it has allowed Allison and his department to write a glowing press release and there is little pressure on the trust to correct the obvious shortcomings. Thus an inquiry ordered by the NHS Executive at considerable public cost has served little if any public interest - but it has jeopardised the careers of those whistleblowers who continue to work at the trust.

M.D.



SIGNAL FAILURES

Degrading Railtrack

ONE of the greatest scandals arising from rail privatisation is the dismissal of scores of qualified signal engineers because Railtrack is not providing work for them.

A serious shortage of these engineers was exposed in 1992 when signalling expert Brian Hesketh highlighted the condition of many signalling installations. He was particularly concerned at the degradation of electric cables, whose insulating sheaths were cracking, crumbling or softening into a liquid state and exposing the metal inside. This could cause signals to malfunction and potentially lead to a rerun of the Clapham Junction crash.

Hesketh's official report identified 100 places where signalling should be replaced and BR and private contractors trained extra engineers who would help meet Hesketh's work schedule. But when Railtrack took over it turned a blind eye to his detailed research. Transport minister Lord Whitty was recently asked which parts of the report had been implemented. He replied that the report "is now out of date" and Railtrack had "adopted its own system for assessing the conditions of signalling".

If Hesketh's report is out of date it is because the situation may now be more urgent than he appreciated. In 1994 huge disruption was caused to passengers in Edinburgh when degraded cables were found to be so dangerous they needed immediate and wholesale replacement. Railtrack then commissioned a new survey of 102 signalling sites, just two years after Hesketh had reported. This exercise again revealed vast quantities of decaying cables.

So what was Railtrack's response? To accelerate replacement of degraded cables perhaps? Not quite. A leaked code of practice dated 1997 states: "Standard degradation can be tolerated in installations provided that cables are not mechanically disturbed. Ongoing replacement can therefore be prioritised by inspection and subjected to a planned replacement programme which ought to obviate the need for any accelerated action."

Railtrack modified the safety standards so managers of work sites where signals have been affected may waive the usual "correlation check" — testing that all switches and wires are hitched to the right signals — wherever that check would involve such "disturbance of fragile wiring or equipment that it is assessed as introducing greater risk to the safety of the railway than would arise from not completing a full correlation". The risk of another miswired signal — as at Clapham — is substantially increased in these circumstances.

A recent analysis of Railtrack for the rail regulator found it had spent less on signal renewals than it promised in 1994. In practice this means only about 10 of the 100 schemes listed by Hesketh seven years ago have been completed.

Railtrack's policy of "tolerating" dilapidation in the railway's most fundamental safety equipment might be an acceptable stop-gap response from a company which had been surprised by the deterioration, lacked the money to address the problem urgently or was severely short of qualified signal engineers.

But Railtrack clearly plans to tolerate degradation not as a short-term stop-gap but for many years. It was not caught by surprise (it had Hesketh's warnings) and it can afford ever-increasing dividends to shareholders from its daily profit of well over £1m.

An army of engineers was trained in BR's last years but now signalling contractors are having to dismiss a large proportion of the country's signal engineers (one company alone is making more than 100 redundant) simply because they are not getting the orders they expected from Railtrack, which prefers to keep safety on a knife edge than part with a little of its cash.

PS: Getting hold of Hesketh's report was not straightforward. It was kept secret by BR, but one MP did place a copy in the House of Commons library. That copy has mysteriously disappeared and Lord Whitty has declined to place another in the library, as if it were somehow in his government's interest to shield Railtrack.

'Dr B. Ching'

Number crunching

3 **Billion pounds** — cost of Jubilee Line extension

Days — time it took to break down

DOWN ON THE FARM

THE rise and rise of organic farming has produced some dramatic conversions among former persecutors. Up and down the country well-known mockers and scoffers are suddenly taking a deep interest in the health of their wallets (*Shurely, "in how to farm in a chemical-free and sustainable way"? Ed.*)

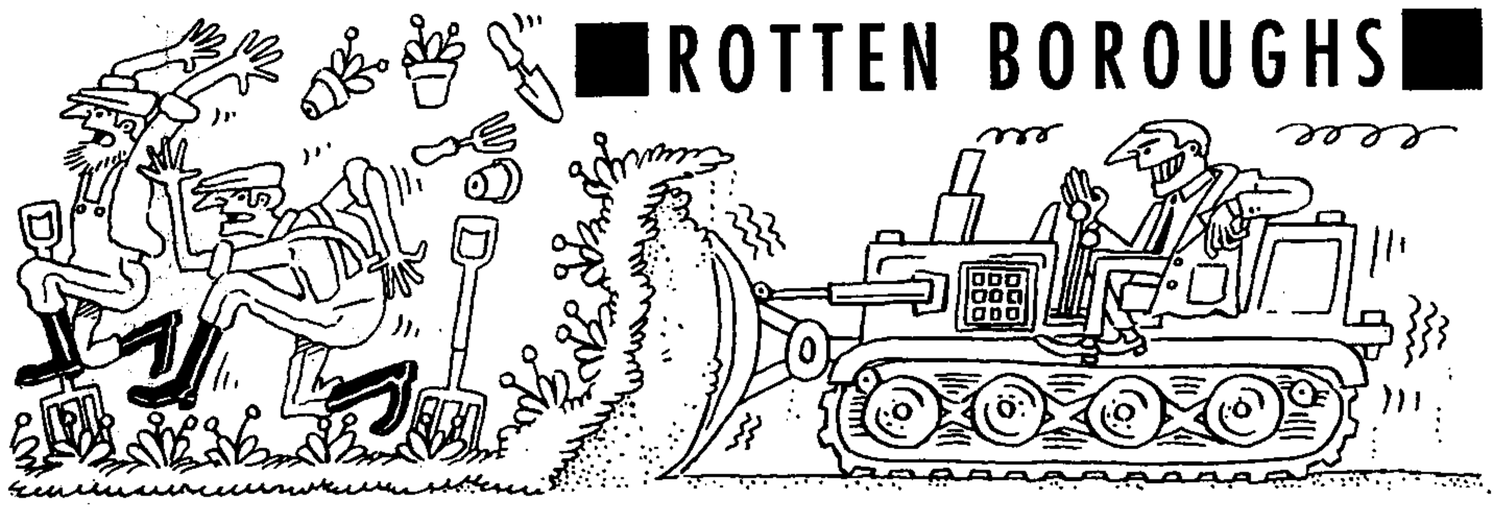
Even critic-in-chief David Richardson, farming's heavyweight commentator, has shifted ground. For years he has peddled the line that this is an expensive con paid for by rich idiots. But with organic farming worldwide growing like spring wheat, and the rest of the industry in the slurry, his latest pronouncement is: "I have no current intention of converting to organic but believe it advisable to keep abreast of market trends." So: this is an expensive con paid for by rich idiots, but on the other hand if there's a bob or two in it...

He then claims that "the organic movement has persuaded many consumers that their produce is best. Organic is now a brand of quality and that is clever marketing".

Clever marketing, eh? So nothing at all to do with 80 years of philosophical writing and practical research? Or with an international standard, established for more than 20 years, which bans the use of all agrochemicals, routine antibiotics, GMOs, factory farming, etc, etc?

Clever marketing, though, is something the wily Richardson can relate to. As the chairman of Linking Environment And Farming – or LEAF, which is better known as LARF (see Eye 961), he and his business cronies have been responsible for attempting to rebrand British Agriculture plc under an environmentally-friendly logo. This has nothing to do with sustainable farming, but could help to fend off new waves of undesirable legislation, including the much-feared pesticide tax. But surely if they use so few sprays, the tax wo n't hurt anyway... will it?'

Gunboat'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CAPITA PUNISHMENT

CAPITA, one of Britain's major "service providers" to local government, has been criticised by benefit fraud inspectors. A department of social security (DSS) audit at Broxbourne borough council, Herts, uncovered delays, poor service methods and exaggerated performance.

Tory Broxbourne pays out some £15m a year in housing and council tax benefits with rent rebates to council tenants. In 1994 it contracted out its benefit processing to Capita.

The audit revealed major disparities between reported and actual performance. Capita claimed a 99 percent success rate in achieving the maximum 14-day turnover between claim and assessment. The figure was sometimes nearer 46 percent. Capita often failed to verify claimants' incomes or addresses, leaving the council vulnerable to fraud.

Capita has provided the same type of service to Lambeth council in south London since 1997. There, complaints to the ombudsman soared from 20 in 1994-95, when the service was run by the council, to a staggering 309 in 1997-98, Capita's second year in charge.

Capita's chief executive Paul Pindar has defended his company's record, blaming Lambeth's problems on inheriting "100,000 items of correspondence and a staff that could neither read nor write". Which must be reassuring to people in Brighton and Hove, where Capita is poised to go into partnership with B&H and three neighbouring district councils to run their revenues and benefits services under the buzzword "best value" scheme (see *Eye* 974).

PS: B&H council leader, Labour peer Lord "Steve" Bassam, was a consultant to Capita until February this year.

PPS: Senior local government officers have been invited to a one-day conference in London on 29 June on delivering "best value" under a "modernising agenda". It costs £299 a head plus VAT. Certainly good value for the organiser – Capita.

IN THE DOCK

IT'S a busy week in the courts in Doncaster. Former Labour councillor and chair of education Pat Mullaney appears at crown court on Thursday on charges of expenses fiddling. The following day, in an unconnected case, the council's chief executive Alf Taylor is up before magistrates facing charges of failing to declare an election expense.

This relates to £21,000 of council taxpayers' money which was spent on a "new" Labour propaganda leaflet *Agenda For Change* (see *Eye* 955) and signed by Mr Taylor and former council leader Malcolm Glover. Mr Glover resigned after being arrested in November last year. He has not been charged.

The case is embarrassing for "new" Labour as the leaflet described how the council was going to change after "old" Labour sleaze was exposed in the "Donnygate" scandal of 1997.

FANTASY ISLAND

FORMER officers of Isle of Wight council have persuaded councillors to let them back aboard a gravy train council taxpayers believed had been driven into the sidings.

The Lib-Dem council's leadership confessed early in 1998 that 34 ex-senior officials of the council had benefited from the "revolving door" policy which allowed them to retire early — then return to their desks days later as "consultants" or even full-time employees (see *Eye* 957). The council's personnel and sourcing committee decreed that no ex-official could be employed by the council within two years of departure. A year on, however, the committee has bowed to officers who have demanded that the two-year rule be lifted.

Applications will be considered by a small group of councillors in secret — despite a warning by senior Lib-Dem councillor Peter Harris, who broke ranks to say: "Public perception that things were being done properly would not be restored if reemployment issues were considered in private by a small group of councillors." Quite.

THE PEOPLE DECIDE

TWO district auditor's reports in the past year, highly critical of Anglesey council, plus the marked reluctance of those councillors named in said reports to step down, made for an interesting election on 6 May.

One of the most keenly contested seats was that of international rugby fan and former council leader Gareth Winston Roberts (see *Eyes passim*), who nevertheless got back in. Alas Cllr Roberts will be unable to represent his constituents until August as the council's standards committee has banned him for a further two months, making a total of eight months so far. The committee still has to examine further complaints against him, including an allegation that he avoided paying VAT on wallpaper for his home by ordering it through the council. Last week Downing St confirmed that the OBE awarded in last year's new year's honours list will not be presented to Cllr Roberts until Inspector Dai Knacker has completed inquiries.

Former housing director John Arthur Jones, sacked last year, stood but was narrowly defeated by 772-79. He is now free to concentrate on a court case where he faces nine charges of misconduct, intimidation and attempting to pervert the course of justice. Also defeated was Egryn Lewis, who forgot to mention his financial interest in land at committee a total of seven times. The voters turned out to have rather better memories.

● **INDEPENDENT Powys county councillor Ivy Lewis, re-elected on 6 May, managed to avoid similar embarrassment. Her court case for fiddling mileage expenses to the tune of £211.31 fell nine days *after* the election. She was sentenced to a month in prison, suspended for a year. Council sleuths were alerted to the fact there was something fishy about her mileage claims by one significant fact: she cannot drive.**

CURSE OF GNOME

SO FAREWELL, then, former Leeds Labour councillor John Clare, who featured in *Eye* 974 after his council-backed training outfit CHEL managed to mislay £150,000 of taxpayers' money.

Clare had to be "reselected" by regional party officials after members in his Harehills ward looked as if they would ditch him. Party officials forgot one minor factor, however – the electorate, who on 6 May booted out Cllr Clare in favour of his Lib-Dem rival by a margin of 312 votes, overturning a Labour majority of 2,777 four years ago.

The ruling Labour party responded to the swing against it in Leeds on 6 May by voting to increase councillors' allowances by 30 percent, bringing the total bill to more than £1m a year.

The US army has said it could press ahead next week with plans to launch a helicopter attack on Serb targets despite a rash on Monday which destroyed one of the 24 Apaches now in Albania.

Grauniad

Letters

Private Eye

Seeing the joke

Sir,

I appreciated your "Blunkett turns a blind eye" joke. Those do-gooder able-bodied types that get outraged on behalf of disabled people really piss me off. I am disabled and I have a friend who is blind who thought the joke was hilarious (well, quite amusing, actually). Disabled people do have a sense of humour, you know, strange but true. The ones that don't should get a life. Keep making me laugh.

Yours,
LIZ BAKER,

Wellington, Somerset.

PS: David Blunkett is an intelligent man, so people don't have to stick up for him, it's so patronising. I'm sure he'd agree.

Lookalike

D'oh!

D'oh!

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the uncanny resemblance between the leader of Her Majesty's opposition and the head of that loveable dysfunctional family, Homer Simpson? I think we should be told!

Yours,
JANE DAVIES,
Biochemistry, University of Birmingham.

Bright 'un, Piers

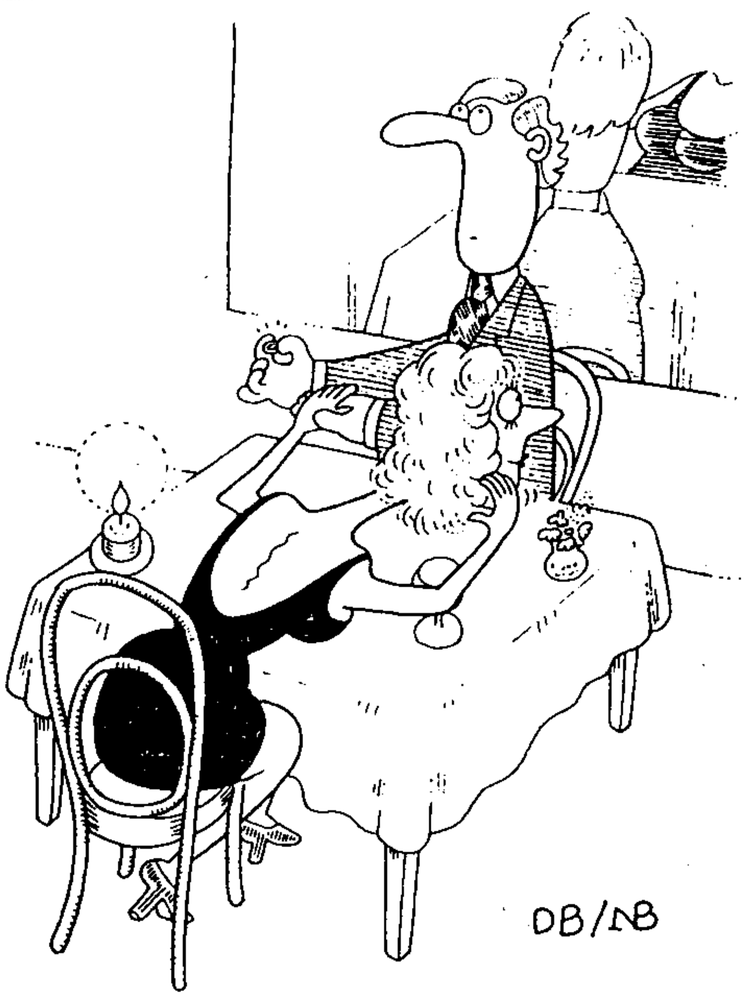
Sir,

Re: my alleged used of the phrase "working operandi". I would just like to point out that I did not say them things.

Yours gormlessly AND moronically,
PIERS MORGAN,

The Mirror.

NEW OLD SAYINGS



A woman's hair is never done

Not welcome

Sir,

*It would take too long to explain why your colour section (14 May) is wrong on **every** point when appraising the situation in Croatia, therefore I will give just one example.*

It is not Pres. Tudjman who objects to "200,000 Serbs returning to Croatia".

It is me.

Between 11-12 November 1994 the neighbouring Serbs attacked and plundered my own village of Zavaljc (nr Bihac), and half a dozen other places nearby, destroying "important strategic objects", ie the church. We know who they were, because they have painted their names and those of their units on the walls of our burned-out houses.

Multiply this with thousands similar incidents and you will probably arrive at the magic number of 200,000.

Now we are supposed to welcome back the perpetrators as long-lost brothers.

Bollocks to that.

Yours sincerely,
MARKO SUTIC,

Croatia.

Krajina shame

Sir,

I'm surprised that you are repeating the one about the Croats "ethnically cleansing" the Serbs from the "Krajina" in Croatia (Eye 976).

Rather than being part of a communist "Greater Serbia", Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. The Serb minority with the support of the Yugoslav Federal Army promptly carved out one third of Croatia (wanting even more), virtually cutting the country in half, with the intention of forming "Greater Serbia". In "Krajina" thousands of Croats were ethnically cleansed; it was in Croatia where the Serbs began the policy. Elsewhere the city of Vukovar was destroyed and Dubrovnik bombarded.

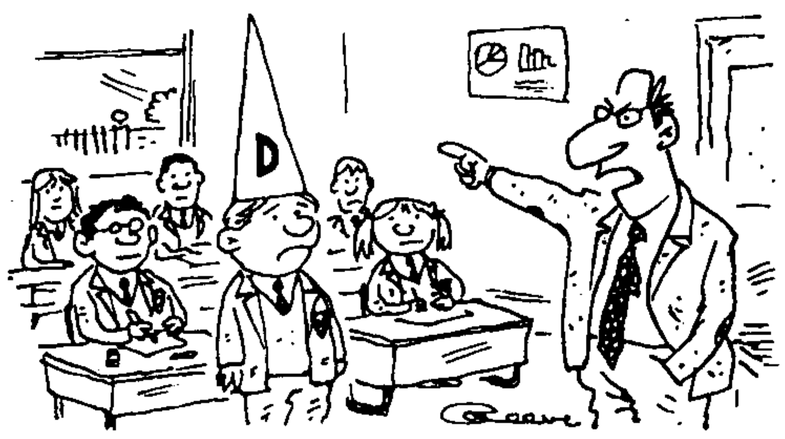
Together, the Krajina Serbs and the Yugoslav Federal Army slaughtered 13,000 Croats and forced half a million of them out of their homes. Over 1,700 are still missing. The UN was supposed to reintegrate the occupied territories back into Croatia but did not. The Krajina Serbs certainly were not interested in negotiations to this end.

In 1995, they assisted the Bosnian Serbs on an assault on the UN safe haven of Bihac (invading a sovereign territory). If this assault had succeeded, Bihac would have fallen (with no doubt Srebrinica style consequences) and "Greater Serbia" established. With a now fully equipped army, Croatia retook its territory in a lightening offensive, which also saved Bihac. The Krajina Serbs fled the region ahead of the offensive – following their leaders. The "invincible" Serbs were defeated for the first time, and with the assistance of NATO bombing the Serbs were rolled back in Bosnia. The "Greater Serbia" project was smashed.

As in all wars, there were some very nasty incidents, which should not be ignored, but the fact is the Krajina Serbs fled because of the fear of reprisals for their killing and ethnic cleansing of Croats – a rather different situation from the "ethnic cleansing" of Serbs you mention.

Regards,
BRIAN GALLAGHER,

Via e-mail.



"Now go and stand in Islington"

No hard felines

Sir,

I write to protest against your recent paragraph about my good friend Cllr Pam Warhurst, "She's Been Quangoed" (2 April 1999).

Quango salaries are excessive – "glitzy stuff" in your phrase, though still chickenfeed compared with those of footballers, entertainers and company chairfolk – but they are determined by national government (mainly Thatcher's who subverted local democracy, but alas perpetuated by Major & Blair). If necessary, functions are entrusted to quangos by national government, and competent persons are found to perform them, do you say they should refuse on grounds of excessive pay? I've known Mrs Warhurst closely for over a dozen years, and she uses all her time and money well, being anything but a "fat cat" – or, for that matter, a Blairite, as you incorrectly claim.

So try to be less quick to chide and slow to bless, please!

Yours sincerely,
CLLR FRANK McMANUS,

Todmorden Town Council.

Lookalike

Richard

Jerry

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the uncanny resemblance between "shock jock" Jerry Springer and Notting Hill estate agent Richard Curtis? Are they by any chance related?

ENA B. RUSHTON,

London W1.

Wight and wrong

Sir,

I refer to your article in Rotten Boroughs 30 April, "Wight Carry-on". You did not check your facts and therefore your allegations are just that.

I am not a "hobby farmer", or a farmer. As a matter of fact I do not even own the land which contains the claimed right of way.

*We did not spend 11 years in an attempt to extinguish a right of way. We **defended a claim** to a right of way which was not on the Definitive Map or any OS map, which was denied by previous owners, and which the local searches before contract stated did not exist. I strongly object to being portrayed as public enemy number one, which simply is not the case.*

The other matter, the so-called "obstruction to a highway", was originated by troublemakers for no other reason than to damage our interests. The matter was settled out of court (a procedure with which you must be familiar) after the High Court ordered the Crown Court judge to state a case, which then revealed so many errors of law that leave for judicial review was swiftly granted to us. Had we not settled the County Council could have been considerably more out of pocket. The Council saw the weakness of their case. That is the only reason why they agreed to settle.

The sums these few troublemakers pushed the Council into spending are horrendous. The High Court action lost in 1989 cost them over £20,000. The so-called obstruction action must have cost £12,000 at least. The unrecoverable costs after taxation of the High Court and Court of Appeal costs were over £18,000. The Council was therefore made to throw away £50,000 for actions that benefit no one.

I strongly object to your allegations of collusion with the County Council implied in your statements which cast aspersion on my character.

M.J.C. O'KEEFE,

Address withheld.

For the Record

Sir,

I realise it must be difficult for you to sit in judgement on others when you talk mostly out of your backside.

Nevertheless, the spiteful little piece on the Daily Record's Disney World schools promotion (Eye 976) takes some beating for sneering inaccuracies.

Eye-Wash: Outraged parents and teachers "jammed the Record's switchboard" when they learned that the school which won the week in Florida had only four pupils.

Fact: Not one complaint was take in.

Eye-Wash: "Terrified of losing all his readers overnight, Editor Martin Clarke hastily announced... that some runners-up could go too."

Fact: The contest had been scrupulously monitored. We had known for two weeks that the winning school only had a handful of pupils so we invited the top 11 schools to the presentation to announce that they would ALL be going.

The only difference was that the winner also picked up a cheque for £10,000 for school funds, while the others got £2,000 each.

Eye-Wash: "most of the other lucky schools were almost as tiny" as the winner.

Fact: We are sending 208 pupils for a week in the sun plus 255 teachers and parents to make sure they have a good time at our expense.

Next time you cock it up so badly, please at least try to make it FUNNY instead of a mean-spirited little whinge.

Yours sincerely,
MARTIN CLARKE,

Editor-in-Chief, Daily Record.

LUVVIES

As far as I was concerned when I played the Mummy, it was all about redemption. I call it "the loneliness of evil".

CHRISTOPHER LEE
Guardian

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

I-SPY *Edinburgh*

Submitted by Pat Davoll. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Colonel Bogus?

Sir,

The letter from James R. Vandeleur is somewhat bizarre. A colonel of that name does not appear on the Army list.

Yours etc,
ANTONY BIRD,

Chichester, West Sussex.

Sir,

Re: Letter by Vandeleur. You appear to be careless over printing letters – or easily conned.

First clue: What regular officer, certainly claiming 40 years' service, puts an MC before a DSC (a Royal Navy decoration) and both before a DSO and bar; certainly not a British officer.

Second clue: Final paragraph. The infantry action at Balaclava was by the 93rd Regiment – later the Sutherland battalion of the A&SH – commanded by Colin Campbell, later C in C of/at the relief of Lucknow, during the Mutiny.

Third clue: Britain and France were fighting the Russians as ALLIES of the Turks.

I know, having spent 34 of my 37 Army years in Education (the first three were in A&SH) that English educational standards have been going down the pan for decades – but really!

Sincerely,
ROY MacLACHLAN,

Preston, Lancs.

Prodi probity

Sir,

I wonder what incorruptible selection process threw up the sad character you present as your own correspondent in Italy (Eye 975). To "cover" Bologna's Roman Prodi with a mixture of innuendo, half truths, pure prejudice and a splatter of slime is unworthy of the standards you yourselves so tirelessly insist on in the Solemn and Moralising sections of your distinguished journal. Indeed, to describe the University of Bologna as "famously corrupt", in the words of your correspondent, might be likened to denouncing the Eye as "famously lying", which would be most unfair surely. Remember, Eye readers want to believe everything they read in their preferred newspaper of record, specially in its s & m sections.

Yours sincerely,
DAVID ELLWOOD,

Associate Professor, University of Bologna.

Z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z...

Sir,

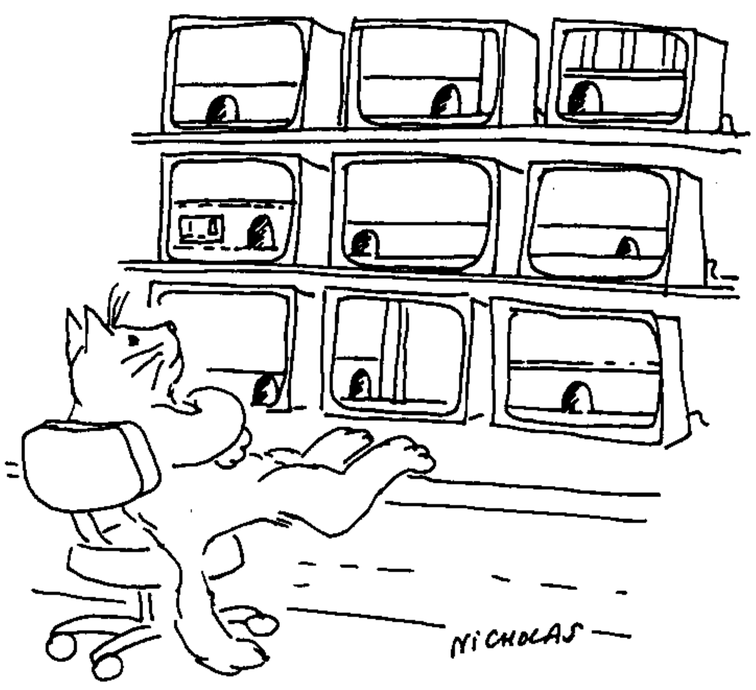
In your Hard Choices graphic you alleged that EU safety directives limit the working hours of junior doctors to 56 hours per week. This is not the case. No EU directives apply to junior doctors working hours – they were vetoed by the last government.

Working hours are controlled only through an agreement which is supposed to be reflected in employment contracts. The control is 56 hours in patient care within overall duty periods of as much as 83 hours (including waiting for emergency cases). Despite this, three years after the last deadline and on the NHS Executive's own figures, one in six junior doctors are being exploited through overwork.

The current government has been caught red-handed proposing that if EU working time directives are to apply, there must be a transitional period of 15 years during which the 56-hours maximum should be legally enforced to a maximum of, you guessed it, 65 hours on average.

DR MARK PORTER,

Burbage, Leics.



Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"If we can beat South Africa on Saturday that will be a great fillip in our cap."
GRAHAM GOOCH, Radio 4
(Gerald Hudson)

"Once the ball is at Overmars's feet, it's like a piece of string."
Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(Mark Cropley)

"I have seen players sent off for far worse offences than that."
ALAN BRAZIL, Sky Sports
(Richard Gollin)

"Steve Waugh won the toss quite easily."
MIKE DENNESS, BBC1
(Mike Walsh)

"If you gave Arsene Wenger eleven players and told him to pick his team, this would be it."
ANDY GRAY, Sky Sports One
(Chris Harrison)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from South Africa

from Our Own Correspondent

So the party dumped quasi-socialism for capitalism, coddles unions while ignoring all they say.... and has a new leader who's a control freak. It is, of course, the ANC.

The African National Congress, under new supremo Thabo Mbeki, will romp home in our second democratic election on 2 June. Ironically this will ensure the triumph of a "free market" and with it the usual equation: the rich get richer while the poor remain shafted. It's a grotesque fact that the financial chasm (or racial inequality, as we used to call it) has actually *increased* since the end of apartheid. But of late, practically everything's been turned on its head.

During that first electrifying election in 1994, terrified whites stockpiled tinned food and kept revolvers under the bed. Today, though they've kept their ill-gotten wealth – and their heads – most whites remain irrationally fearful of the ANC. They are, in short, too stupid to realise, as a recent scholarly study concluded, that "the ANC's historic role is both to represent and control the poor majority".

This time the most excitement we've had is ruthless backstabbing (mostly within the ANC) and cynical party-hopping. The ANC has welcomed several high-profile "New" National Party defectors, jumping apartheid's sinking ship and promising to deliver their "Coloured" supporters in return for rumoured cushy jobs.

ANC candidate for the provincial presidency of Gauteng (Jo'burg, Pretoria, etc) is Mbhazima Shilowa. Only yesterday Mr Shilowa, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, was known as "Sam" and wore a worker's cap. Now married to our richest businesswoman, he flies first class and is a member of the Cigafrique club, puffing Cuban Cohibas, a box of which costs more than most workers' monthly wage. "Sam" is on the central committee of the Communist party, *natch*.

Democracy, not being a simple matter of black or white, has done wonders for other prominent unionists too. Both ex-mineworkers' official Marcel Golding and former garment workers' leader John Copelyn, by managing trade union investment funds, have become millionaires. Black economic empowerment has seen directors of several "empowerment" companies awarding themselves vast pay rises and zillions of share-options. Their defence? It's one's patriotic duty as a black South African to set an example by becoming filthy rich. We're told this loot will "trickle down" to the poor black worker. As under the white bosses, it never does.

White business is represented by the Democratic Party, successor to a brave liberal tradition but today reduced to a strident ethnic clique: a natural home for many who not long ago voted for apartheid ("But I knew nothing about the atrocities!"). Further to the right, Boer leader General Constand Viljeon, whose troops committed vile atrocities ("But I knew nothing about that!") is currently whining about "reverse apartheid". In this mirror-image world it's hardly surprising that chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, whose Zulu-nationalist IFP slowly wilts away, is being strongly mooted as Mbeki's deputy president – even though Buthelezi is repeatedly named in Archbishop Tutu's truth and reconciliation report as party to "gross human rights violations".

We are all suffering near total amnesia. Five years ago the Pan Africanist Congress slogan was "One settler, one bullet". But recently the PAC leader, a reverend, demanded criminals have arms, legs, even heads chopped off. So Free State white farmers, once a prime PAC assassination target, now clumsily embrace their main ideological foe.

The silliest remark of the election comes from a British Liberal Democrat. Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson, mayor of Newbury, here earlier this year training the DP, wrote on his return: "The ANC is a party of systematic violence." Despite our manifold sins and new democratic duplicities, at least millions of poor, uneducated, previously disenfranchised folk know that the ANC delivered the beloved country from such violence, and so far remains the best guarantor of our surprising, systematic peace.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

"Nipple stealing from mermaids has become a huge problem in Irish pubs," Sam Stewart of Richmond Design told Richard Costelloe. "That's why our company began specialising in making replacement nipples. It's a delicate business which requires a skilled carpenter, because each pair have to be made-to-measure, to fit the mermaid's bust size."

Costelloe, the owner of Moby Dick's (a nautical theme pub in Limerick), had earlier outlined his problem to Stewart. "I wanted a mermaid as the focal point of the pub, and I bought this one because it was an authentic carving, which had spent many years on the bow of a ship. She's life-sized and looks very pleasant, but the day after we opened the pub, I noticed that her nipples had gone. She looked very peculiar without them, and I hadn't any idea where to find replacement ones, but eventually I tracked down your company. Since then, I must have got through at least twenty-six pairs of replacement nipples. Incredibly, we've never seen the nipple thief in action, even though the mermaid is in the centre of the bar, in full view of everyone."

Stewart then described some of the anti-theft measures his company has tried. "Connecting the nipples to the electricity supply was, apparently, illegal, and the police soon put a stop to that. Since then, we've used all sorts of glue, but none of them was strong enough, so now we're making the nipples in two sections. The carpenter screws the back section of the nipple onto the mermaid's body, and the outer section fits snugly over this. This creates a suction effect, and we're also using the strongest glue, so we're feeling more confident this time. This design has already lasted for four weeks on the mermaid of another pub we look after, so now we're hoping that the nipples are here to stay." *(Woman's Way, 27/2/99. Spotter: J. Headen)*

—●—

● "Notification for Guests. Don't leave the valuables and cash in your room. Our sentry in the front desk can keep those for you and charge nothing. If they vanish, he is irresponsible.

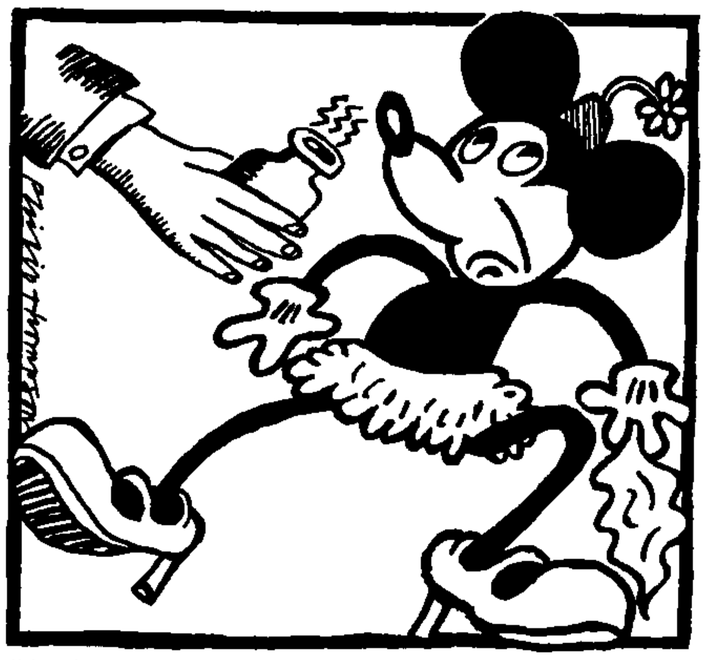
"According to the Chinese Law and the relevant regulations of our Hotel, you should not take the articles that are easy to flammable, to demolish to the Hotel, you should not take narcotic drupes and the articles that have the exploding for taste and persecution and the radioactivity to our Hotel. You should not go whoring, take chirp, mame dog and gamin in the Hotel. Don't do something wrong because you drunk too much.

"The time for payment. For the guest who live for a short time, they should pay the cost for room and service charge before they leave. For the guest who live for a long time, they should pay the cost of room and service charge of last month by 5th of each month. No threat no kill." *(Notice in Hanshou Hotel, China. Spotter: Kevin White)*

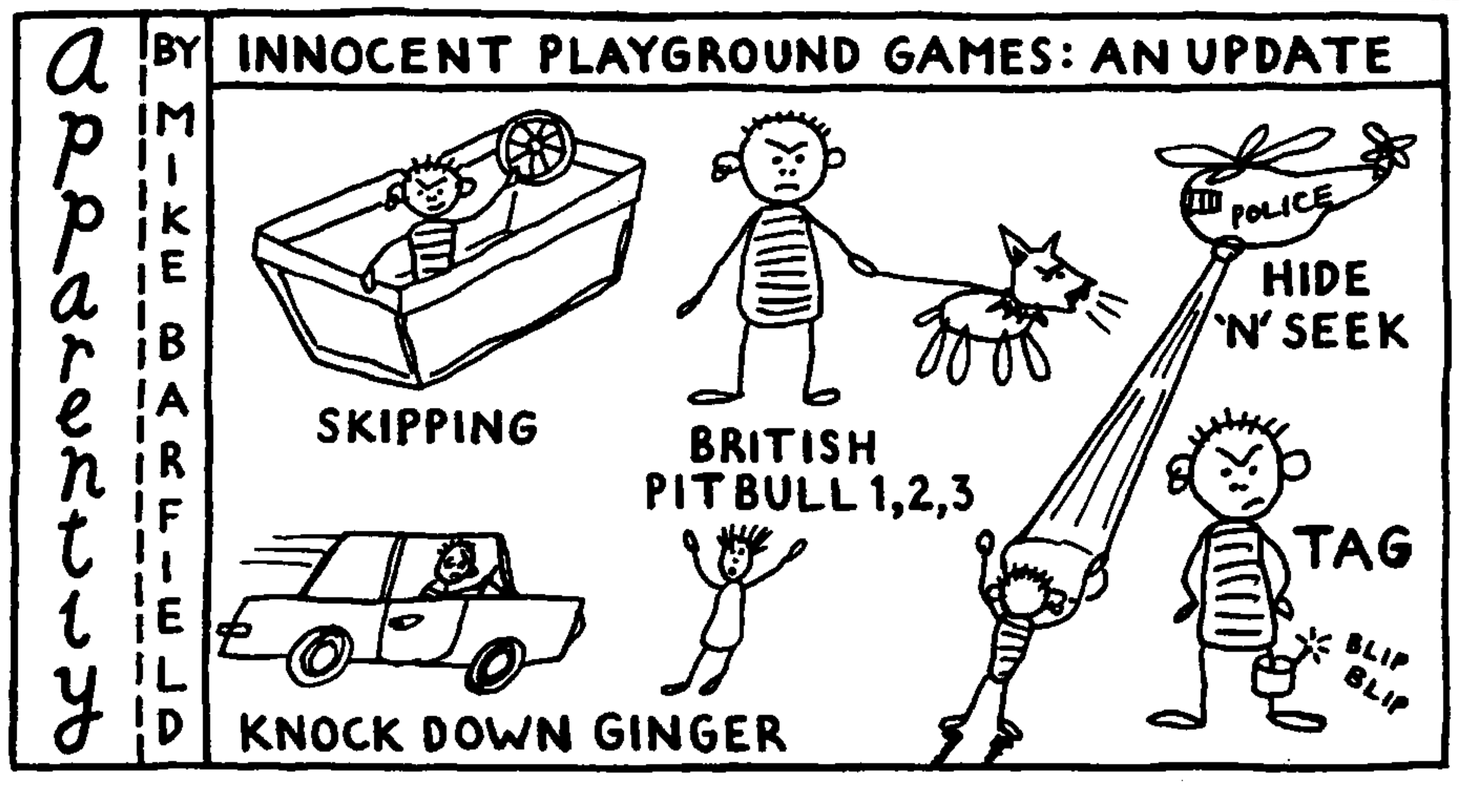
—●—

● *"Before Western influences, there were many Shinto and Buddhist fertility festivals like this one," explained Shinto priest Hirohiko Nakamura as he carried a giant steel penis through the streets of Kawasaki Daishi in Kanagawa Prefecture. "But after Japan opened up to the world, the Meiji government banned them because they feared they would give a bad impression."*

Kanamara Shrine's Festival of the Steel Phallus takes place annually in Kawasaki Daishi on the second Sunday in April, when thousands of people congregate and carry two-metre-high steel and plastic penises through the streets, while even larger ones are drawn along on "mikoshi" (religious floats). "In the old days, local prostitutes would come here to pray for good business, and for protection from syphilis," explained Nakamura.

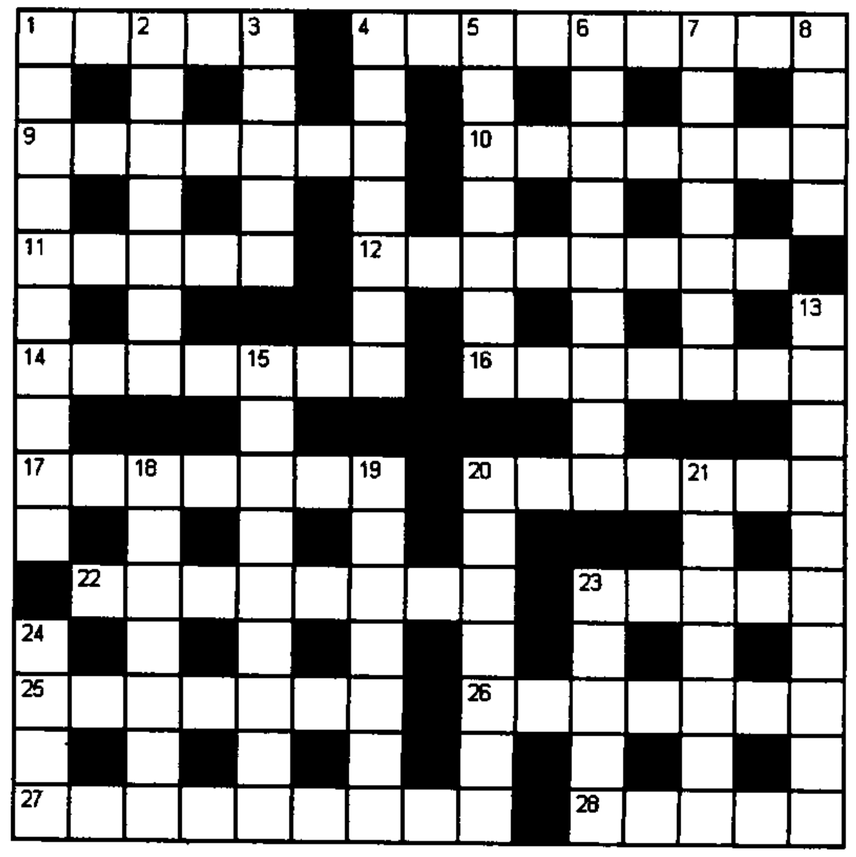


"And parents still encourage their daughters to straddle this wooden penis-shaped see-saw for good luck. Whether your prayers be for success in business, healthy progeny, a fertile marriage, wedded bliss, an easy delivery, or personal good health, the Kanamara Shrine is still the focus of faith in the community, as it has been for centuries. After the procession is ended, perhaps you would like to visit the workshop where the steel phalluses are forged? Or perhaps wander round the museum, where you can see traditional porcelain figurines engaged in acts of sodomy, and a Micky Mouse doll with a penis so large and erect that Minnie would surely faint?" (The Japan Times, 18/4/99. Spotter: Jonathan Morley)



EYE CROSSWORD 132

by Cyclops — *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 Do it to a road-rager and he could do it to you! (3,2)
4 Pursue women, end up almost in the gutter? (4-5)
9 Not all conclude Monica's hellish (7)
10 As attentive as our princely Brian is? (3,4)
11/12 Michael's new body over which he has less control than hoped for (5,8)
12 (see 11)
14 Tosses off Charles — university replaces one (7)
16 After flipping brief surgery, sadly no tit to put your finger on (5,2)
17 Is in opposition, so thing comes to point (7)
20 Thatcher endlessly fiddled with chopper (7)
22 That's how downers obscured climax (8)
23/18 Yeltsin / Major's acceptable as a screwy 6 dn. (5,7)
25 Suitable surface for those on the job in every way? (7)
26 Sod all right with a Conservative's flowery speech (7)
27 Academy would need grit to take on controversial artist, we hear (9)
28 One having an erection found on stairs? (5)

DOWN

1 Southern beer following fish balls (10)
2 Tosser and what he drinks out of? (7)
3 Blow that's taken a lot out of Fayed (5)
4 Be a forceful manager and get behind your staff (4,3)
5 Rises to full height to bring up drink (5,2)
6 Contributors to whom size (in inches) really does matter (9)
7 One pretty awful fate for a disreputable type (1,3,3)
8 Flourishing boozer (4)
13 Sybil making Dorothy Sayers dry out (10)
15 Rough-cut look a feature of this organ (9)
18 (see 23 ac.)
19 Spy tail-less comical dog mounting Brenda (7)
20 Pass the time as Liz Hurley is wont to do (4,3)
21 The non-Brit's departmental British institution? (7)
23 Hawkish politician responsible for Belgrade's opening retreat? No, actually (5)
24 Raise points on party lines (4)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 4.6.99. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 131

Winner: NICHOLAS TIMS

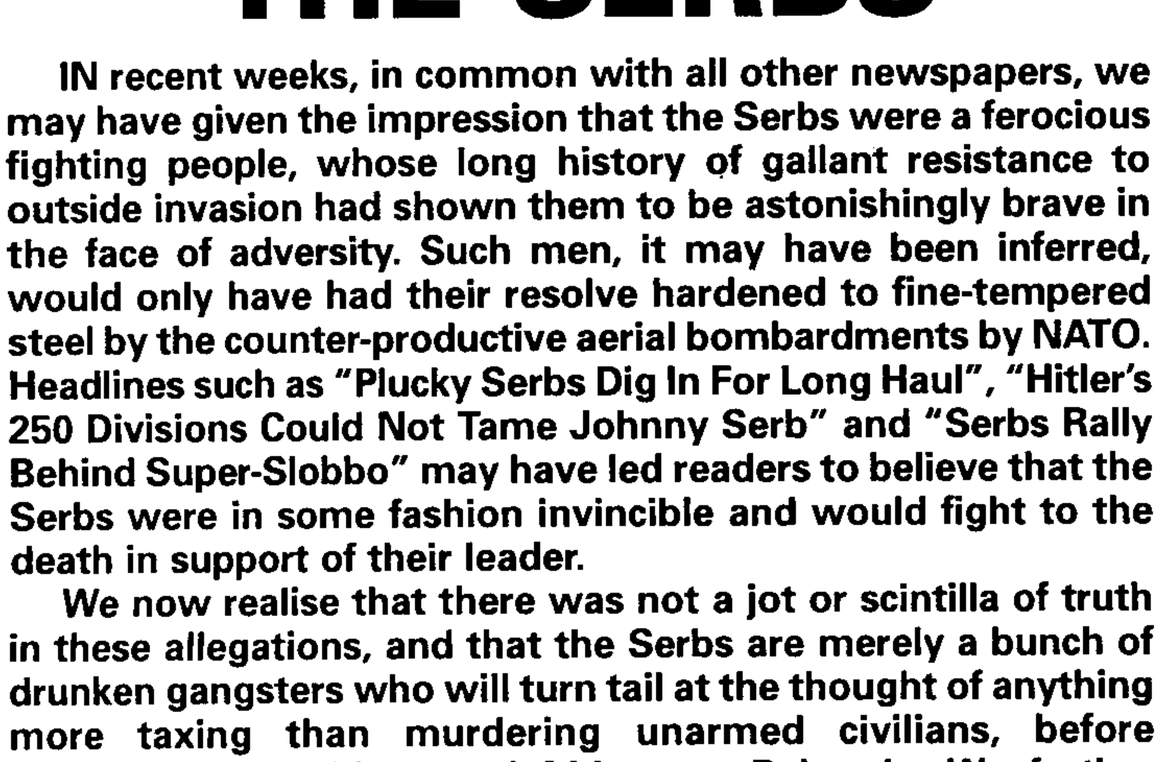
ACROSS: 1 Charmer 5 Bladder 9/1dn Ambulance-chaser 10/19dn Glass ceiling 11 Earls 12 Whip-round 13 Skivvy 15 Entente 17 Comical 19 Contra 21 Mussolini 23 Bacon 25 Octet 26 Oligarchy 27 Flat out 28 Garbled.

DOWN: 1 (see 9) 2 Amber 3 Milosevic 4 Runaway 5 Beehive 6 Anger 7 Do a runner 8 Rushdie 14 Kama Sutra 16 Tony Blair 17 Come off 18 Laid out 19 (see 10) 20 Undyed 22 Outdo 24 Cecil.

Apology THE SERBS

IN recent weeks, in common with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression that the Serbs were a ferocious fighting people, whose long history of gallant resistance to outside invasion had shown them to be astonishingly brave in the face of adversity. Such men, it may have been inferred, would only have had their resolve hardened to fine-tempered steel by the counter-productive aerial bombardments by NATO. Headlines such as "Plucky Serbs Dig In For Long Haul", "Hitler's 250 Divisions Could Not Tame Johnny Serb" and "Serbs Rally Behind Super-Slobbo" may have led readers to believe that the Serbs were in some fashion invincible and would fight to the death in support of their leader.

We now realise that there was not a jot or scintilla of truth in these allegations, and that the Serbs are merely a bunch of drunken gangsters who will turn tail at the thought of anything more taxing than murdering unarmed civilians, before removing their videos and fridges to Belgrade. We further realise that any close study of the history of the Balkans would immediately reveal that the Serbs' capacity to lose every war they have ever fought is equalled only by that of NATO. We would like to apologise for any confusion caused by our earlier reports.



CELEBRITY DID NOT TAKE COCAINE

An Eye Exclusive

by Our Investigative Reporters **Sheik Itall-Abott** (Reg Filth) and **the Rt Hon Arabella Foxtrot** (Tracy Slapper) with additional reporting by **Sharon Tart**

A WELL-KNOWN celebrity has admitted to Private Eye that he has never taken cocaine nor sold any to his friends.

This extraordinary revelation could well end his career and has sent out shockwaves through the world of showbusiness.

In a classic honey-bee sting, our reporters taped a late night conversation with the famous star of stage, screen and sports field.

Here is the incredible transcript of shame:

Slapper: One two testing testing... Oh hello! Fancy a leg-over, big boy – I'm all yours. Just get me some stuff, ie cocaine, an A grade drug with a street value of £4 million.

Celeb: I beg your pardon. Have we been introduced?

Slapper: Come up to my bedroom for a steamy love romp just so long as you get the stuff, okay?

Celeb: Goodness me, look at the time. I must get home, I'm doing the school run tomorrow. Well, good evening, a pleasure to meet you...

But the star's agent angrily denied that his client was "squeaky clean" or free from "the taint of sleaze".

"It was a one-off," protested the agent. "He was tired, he had been working hard. It was a lapse, for God's sake."

But last night the celebrity refused to comment further and *(continued page 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 94)*

TV Highlights

ITV 10.00 pm

Tonight With Trevor Barbados

The hard-hitting current affairs show continues to lift the lid on contemporary issues. Tonight it's:

- *Exploding Toasters — Have the IRA discovered a new secret weapon?*
- *Fake Opticians — Are your glasses really made out of GM plastic?*
- *The Sex Trade — How the TV men exploit the pornographers for their own purposes.*

Sky Rubbish 3 7.30 pm

The Godfather Part 94

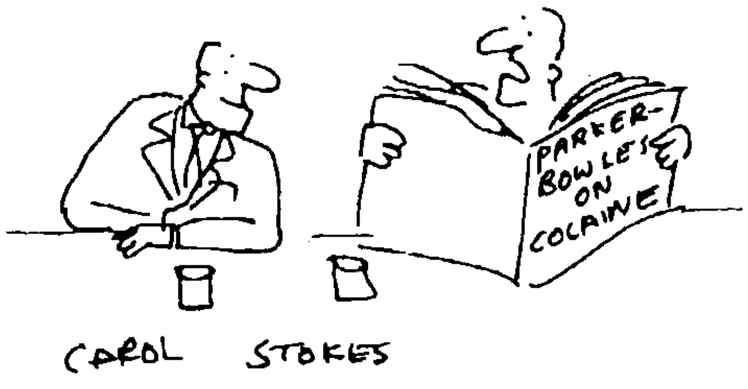
Charlie "The Ears", head of the Windsor family, is The Godfather. In this sequel he takes the family into the twilight world of organic foods. Trouble starts when his godson Tom (by his flighty mistress Camilla) starts getting involved in the narcotics trade and threatens to bring the whole clan crashing down. Will the Cosa Nostril survive?

Eye rating: Snort ***(shurely 'snooze'? Ed)***

BBC1 7.30 pm

Trolley Rage

Secret supermarket CCTV footage of dangerous outbursts of trolley rage in the nation's shopping aisles. Watch Britain's shoppers run amok. Includes stabbing, murder, and multiple trolley pile-ups resulting in thousands of deaths.



"He was born with a silver straw in his nose"

BLONDE WOMAN GIVES UP JOB ON MAGAZINE

by Our Media Staff **Phil Space** with additional reporting by **Phillipa Page**

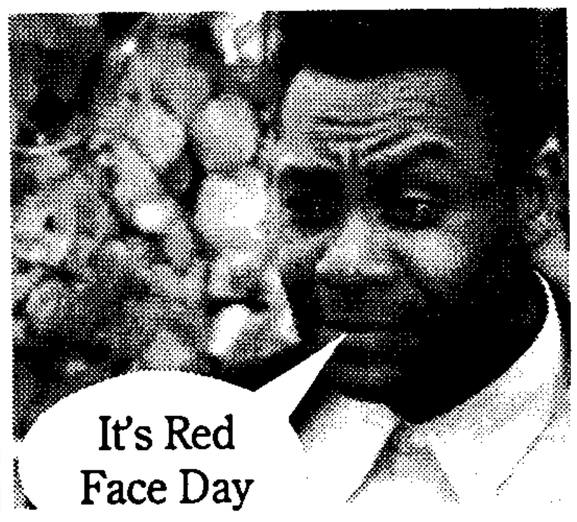
A BLONDE woman today left her post as editor of a society magazine. *(Reuters)*

THAT HUGH GRANT INTERVIEW

A Private Eye Digest Service
Reprinted from all newspapers.

Floppy hair... charming... engaging smile... gosh... floppy hair... boyish good looks... public school accent... floppy hair... Liz Hurley's dress... unfortunate incident in Los Angeles... er... gosh... floppy hair... ghastly journalists aways writing about how marvellous I am... er... that's it.

© Notting Hype



It's Red Face Day

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And once again I am writing to you from the St Albion's Mission in Macedonia, where I have had yet another wonderful welcome from all the refugees.

I can't tell you how it helps me to keep parish affairs in perspective to come out here once more to receive the thanks of all these poor people for all we are doing to stop the Serbs throwing them out of their homes.

It has really been humbling to walk through the huge crowds of people, cheering and calling out "Tony, Tony," as I pass among them, distributing all the clothes left over from our last parish jumble sale.

I shall never forget the tears in the eyes of one old lady who had lost everything, when I presented her with a nearly new electric toaster as a symbol of St Albion's commitment to helping these unfortunate people.

They may not have electricity or bread in these camps, but at least they know that we at St Albion's have not forgotten them.

And, on a very personal note, I have to say that the thousands of people on the hillside calling out my name gave me some idea of what Our Lord must have felt on that first Palm Sunday all those millions of years ago, when he was welcomed as the Saviour of the world.

Of course, I'm not suggesting any parallel! Only pointing out that people out here are pretty grateful for what I am trying to do, in stark contrast, to be honest, to those people back home who seem to spend all their time whingeing and pretending they know more about what is going on that those of us who have rolled up our sleeves and got stuck in.

I expect my friend in Tesco has been very disappointed not to see me at the checkout, so that he can ask me one of his usual silly questions such as "Will it be all over by Christmas then, Vicar?"

Of course, it won't be all over by Christmas. No one ever said it would be, except possibly Mr Campbell, who was no doubt misquoted!

As it says in the words of that wonderful old hymn, "Keep right on to the end of the road, keep right on to the end."

And if that means I've got to come out here to Macedonia to have my picture taken every week until the year 2000, so be it.

And talking of the year 2000, I was telling my new Albanian friends about our wonderful Millennium Tent.

And, you know, they were so excited that they asked if they could have it to live in.

That's the difference between them and some of the less grateful members of the parish!

Yours (in the footsteps of St Paul in Macedonia!),

Tony

The Vicar's Postbag...

I would like to share with you all a very moving letter I have received from a local doctor and former member of the parish.

Dear Tony,

I have long been an admirer of everything that you are doing at St Albion's. As you know, I had a disagreement with one of your predecessors, Canon Gummidge, as a result of which I left the church and set up my own church, which later merged with the United Liberal Reform Church, which then became the United Liberal and Social Democratic Reform Church. But how I would like to rejoin your Church, provided I could be given an important job to do in keeping with my abilities and status. Please find my CV enclosed.

Yours faithfully,
Dr David Owen.

P.S. I'm afraid I cannot supply the names of any referees as I have fallen out with everyone I have ever met. But I hope this will not count against me!

Obviously, it is a pleasure to welcome home any prodigal son but, as Mr Campbell has explained to Dr Owen, we have not got any parish post suitable for him at the moment, but we will keep his name on file, should any such vacancy arise, which it will not.

A First For St Albion's!

We have appointed a new "Parish Poet", Mr Motion, who will be writing regular poems in this newsletter on a wide range of important issues. Here is his first effort, which I am sure will be enjoyed by parishioners of all ages, genders and orientations!

MEETING THE VICAR

We met at the pub. And sat
Outside, because it was sunny.
Tony, the vicar, had half a lager and
A bag of
Ready salted crisps.
I had a ploughman's and
A tonic water.
To begin with, conversation was a bit
Stilted.
A No.94 bus went past, like
A great red bus.
Then another. And another.
"Isn't it strange," I observed,
"How the buses come in threes?"
He laughed and it broke
The ice.
After that we got on like
A house on fire.
Or a fire raging through
A house.
"Could I be the parish poet?"
I asked, as we stood in the car park,
Like two men standing in a car park.
He laughed. "We'll be in touch,"
He said.
And he is "in touch", Tony.
What a great
Bloke.

Andrew Motion
The People's Parish Poet.

XXXX Our Thanks To XXXX

● All who turned out to support **Cherie** and **Mrs Clintstone** (wife of our good friend the Rev. William Jefferson Clintstone, minister of the Church of the Seven Day Fornicators) at their wonderful coffee morning to launch our new parish Childline. As Hillary put it so well, "You know, kids matter! They are the future!"

● **Mr Sainsbury** for the delicious Barbecued GM Vegetarian Soyaburgers at the Parish Bar-B-Q Evening. As Church Warden Mr Cunningham put it: "These things are so safe and so delicious I'm almost tempted to eat one myself!"

TEXT OF THE WEEK

"Take up your bed and work!"
Our Lord's message
to the disabled! T.B.

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

THOSE MI6 NAMES IN FULL

as anonymously revealed on the Internet by top-secret website www.fugginlies.harrods.co.uk

1 Her Majesty the Queen (code name "Brenda"). Known to have personally ordered the murder of Princess Diana and Prince Dodi.

2 HRH the Duke of Edniburgh (code name "Keith"). Colluded in the brutal murder of Diana and Dodi.

3 His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (code name "Brian"). Known to have personally been the driver of the white Fiat Uno which caused the fatal crash leading to the above murders.

4 Tom Bower (code name "Fuggin' Bastard"). Hired by the Queen to assassinate the character of His Royal Highness Mohamed Al-Fayed of That Shop.

5 Jack Straw (code name "Labour Pooftah"). Conspired with fellow poofs to deny British passport to HRH Mohamed Al-Fayed.

6 Lord So-Called Norman Tebbit (code name "Ungrateful Shit"). Took gifts from generous Middle Eastern benefactor and then bad-mouthed him in the press.

7 R.W. Rowland (code name "Tiny"). Faked own death in order to work undercover for HM The Queen in her plans to prevent the rightful award of a passport to His Supreme Holiness the Dalai Fayed.

8 Dominic Lawson (code name "Rosa's Husband"). Expert in black propaganda who uses his newspaper to discredit

(cont'd. website 94)

FUGGIN' BUBBLE COMPETITION

Tony Phillips

Thanks to the hundreds of readers who entered the competition. Most entries unfairly compared the humorous magazine to a sedative, anaesthetic, emetic, enema or substitute for toilet paper, so congratulations to the following, and a year's free sub to Tony Phillips from East Ewell.

Patient: I'd like to read that.
Nurse: As I thought, Brain Damage. *(J.H. Brindle)*

Patient: Is it serious, nurse?
Nurse: Well, it's not very funny. *(Anon)*

Nurse: Free Punch?
Patient: Blimey! Bribery, threats of violence and female impersonation is no way to get a passport, Mr Fayed. *(Chris Wright)*

Patient: I've got piles, Nurse.
Nurse: So has Mr Fayed. *(Anon)*

THE BOOK OF BENJAMIN

Chapter 94

1. And after Benjamin that is called Net-an-ya-hu had ruled over the children of Israel for many years, the appointed day drew near when they should choose whether Benjamin was to continue ruling over them or no.
2. And Benjamin saith unto the people, "Hearken unto me. For have I or have I not brought peace and prosperity to the land?"
3. And with one voice they cried unto him, "No, thou hast not, matey," which is to say "O wise leader".
4. Then Benjamin changeth tack, and saith unto them, "Look then upon my wife, Sara. Is she not fair and comely, as befitteth one who hath been the handmaiden of El-Al, which is to say, she goeth amongst the travellers and saith unto them, 'Wouldst thou like to soothe the temples of thy head with this hot towel, which is scented with the oil of cedar and of bergamot?'"
5. And the people crieth, "Get on with it."
6. Then Benjamin waxeth wroth, and saith unto them, "Woe unto you, O children of Israel. For have I not also smitten the Arab-ites and the Araf-ites and the Ham-asites, even as did all those who went before me, even Beg-in and Sham-ir, but not Rab-in obviously, whose liver was like unto that of a chicken, or even of the lily that wilteth in the noonday sun?"
7. "And, furthermore, have I not also built many fine dwellings on the bank that is west, with extensive views looking down over the tents of the Araf-ites?"
8. "And have I not also hearkened unto the high priests and Pharisees, who weareth their long beards and black hats, and who driveth around in Volvos?"
9. Have I not, as they have bidden me, driven the Arab-ites forth from the Holy City of Jerusalem, in order that their homes may be sold off cheap to the children of Israel?"
10. "What more, frankly, can thou wantest me to do?"
11. And they all cried with one voice, "Go forth, Benjamin, and spend more time with thy family."
12. "Or find the lake that is called Galilee and jump therein."
13. "For we have wearied of thee and thy smooth tongue and crafty ways, as we have wearied also of thy wife Sara, the handmaid of El-Al, who bringeth forth the trolley that is called duty free, laden with all the perfumes of Arabia."
14. And the people cried, "We shall have Bar-ak in your place."
15. And Benjamin was cast into the wilderness, weeping, with his wife.
16. And so Bar-ak was chosen to rule over the people of Israel. And they said, "Lo, he is the chosen one, the saviour, our equivalent of Tony Blair."

Here endeth the Book of Benjamin

ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO VOTERS

Dear Voter,

On June 10th you will have an opportunity to cast your vote for the European Parliament.

This year the voting has been modernised to bring it into line with the rest of Europe.

Read these instructions carefully and take them to the polling booth with you.

HOW IT WORKS

The country has been divided into twelve new regional constituencies. You can see which constituency you are in by going to your library, unless it has been closed. If it has, you can check out the name of your region from the internet, or by writing to your MP whose address will be in the local library.

You then go to your nearest polling station where you will be handed an 84-page leaflet on "How To Vote".

When you have read this you will be given a voting form, 712 millimetres long.

To simplify the voting procedure, the names of the candidates have been replaced by easy-to-spot symbols – eg Lib Dems are indicated by a yellow balloon; the Tories by an orange-and-purple ice-cream cone; New Labour by a red banana; Ulster Unionists by a green bow-tie; Greens by a purple pig; United Kingdom Get Britain Out Of Europe Party by a pink elephant; Transcendental Levitation and Happiness For All Party by a black duck.

AT THE POLLING BOOTH

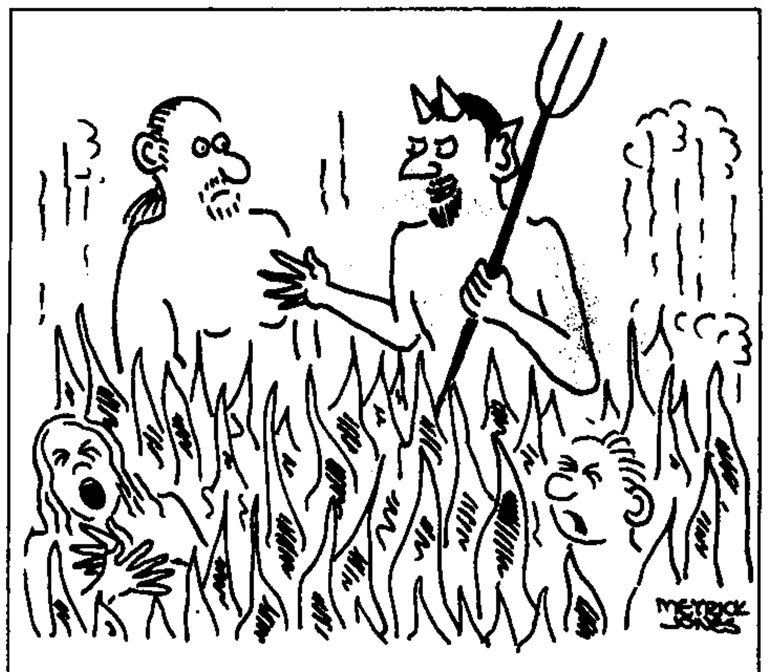
Unroll your voting paper and decide which of these symbols most closely represents your personality.

Eg, if you are a strong, well-motivated Taurean, you are likely to align yourself with positive colours, such as red, purple or yellow.

For the more introverted, sensitive, artistic type less aggressive colours are likely to be favoured, such as pink or beige.

We would like you to discover the "Inner You" and your perfect love partner.

For further details, visit our website – www.euroelection lovesigns.brussels.com



"Actually, I like to think that I started the whole goatee thing"

War Briefing

Week 94

☐ **Monday. NATO bombs Swedish Embassy, two hospitals and teddy bear factory in Novi Sad.**

☐ **Tuesday. NATO spokesman Jamie Shea apologies for bombing Swedish Embassy and hospitals, but defends attack on teddy bear factory on grounds that a 1954 Blue Guide to Novi Sad had shown it as a "key military installation".**

☐ **Wednesday. Blair flies out to Macedonia to promise "every Kosovar refugee child will be given a teddy bear by NATO". Three more US Apache helicopters crash on training mission to drop teddy bears onto camps.**

☐ **Thursday. NATO bombs Romania, mistaking it for Bulgaria. Robin Cook and Madeline Albright appear on thousands of television programmes. Says Cook, "Milosevic is cracking up. He keeps going on TV to claim he is winning."**

☐ **Friday. Luxembourg foreign minister calls for an end to ground war and pledges that not a single Luxembourg soldier will be sent into Kosovo.**

☐ **Saturday. John Simpson predicts sunny spell with occasional rain, based on information from "Belgrade government sources" (S. Milosevic). It snows all day.**

☐ **Sunday. NATO warplanes attack Belgrano, killing hundreds of innocent Argentine fish. Jamie Shea explains the bombs had been targeted on Belgrade, which was "only three letters out — not a bad ratio, considering the number of cock-ups we have made".** *(To be continued)*

HUSBAND

Wow thats the best car weve nicked, let grab a pint
NEW INN
Come on lets go for a spin before we dump it
Bastards, the wheels have been nicked!

TV Highlights

British Continuity Announcer Awards 1999

ITV 7.00-11.00pm

At last, a much-deserved night of glitz and glamour for those national treasures — television's continuity announcers — as viewers get to vote for their favourite links people in the business. Will the quirkiness of the man on Channel 4 triumph over the establishment voices of the BBC? A nation holds its breath. Presented by Mariella Frostrup and Jonathan Ross's brother.

POLLY FILLER

"MY NOTTING HILL"

WHEN I first moved to London I could easily have ended up in Notting Hill. This was in pre-Slobbo days (ie, when I wasn't living with the useless Simon) and when Charlie wasn't even a drunken twinkle in Simon's eyes after he had spent the night watching Juventus vs. Quattroformaggio at the Bar Italia.

No, I was young, free, single and very attractive and Notting Hill was where people like me wanted to be.

With its leafy garden centres, quaint, Victorian shopping malls and the celebrated antique fish market in Camden Passage Road, Notting Hill is the quintessential London village. Where else can you find blue doors on Regency mews terraces and cobbled stucco façades under Georgian railway arches? Where else are you likely to bump into Peter Mandelson, Richard Curtis and Madonna, all buying Algerian coffee at the Cafe Guevarra on the corner of Portobello Avenue and Westbourne Square?

No, Notting Hill has always been unique. But is it still unique now that "That Film" has put it so firmly on the map?

I WENT back and wandered around what would have been my old haunts (if I hadn't decided to buy a flat in Battersea instead and then move to Streatham in the hope of getting more of a garden).

So, I followed in the footsteps of Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts, browsing through the shelves of the second-hand flower stalls and finally, like them, buying a croissant from the old Greek bakery next to the Baptist Tabernacle Mission Centre across the road from Asda.

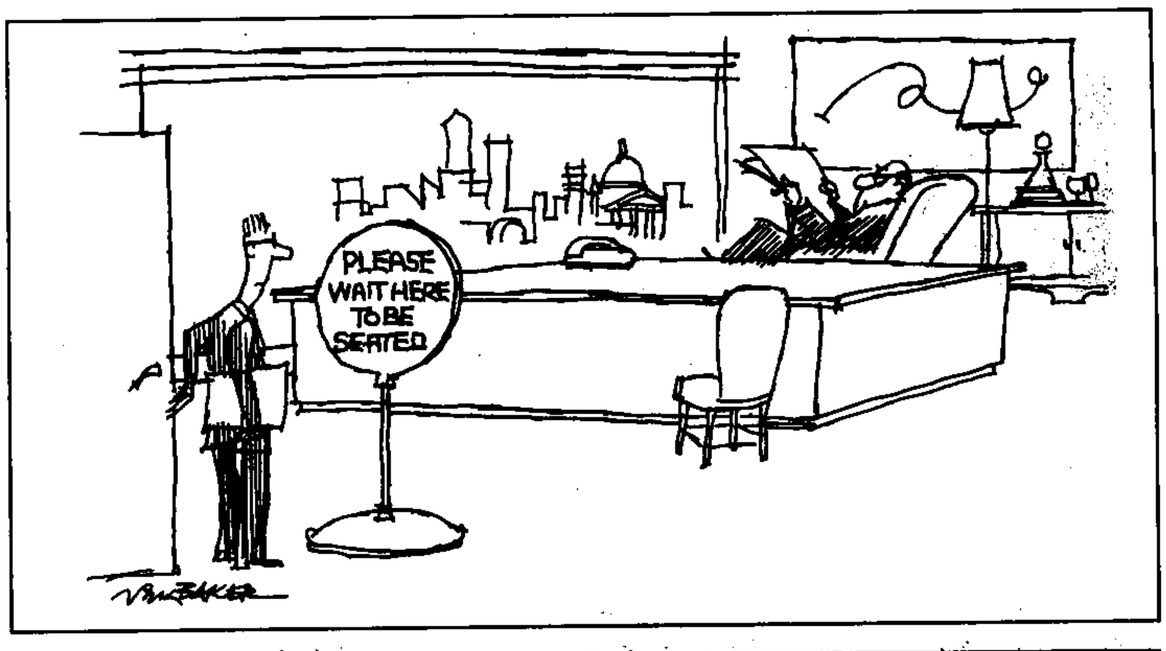
So, has it changed? I would have to say "Yes, it has" in some ways, but in other ways it remains the same Notting Hill I never knew.

©Polly Filler

School News

St Cokes

Eton Term begins today. There are 278 boys in jail. JRD Nose-Candy (Snorters) is Head of Sniffers. RLP Snow-Job (Dealers) is Keeper Of The Silver Spoon. There will be an inspection of the school by Superintendent PRV Truncheon (O.C.) who will arrest most of the Upper Sixth. Drugs will be run on June 4th through Founder's Nose. The Parker Bowl, awarded for Inter-House Peddling, has been won by PLJ Substance-Abuse (Charlies). Overdoses are on 31st June.



EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS

WHO'S WHO IN THE SENSATIONAL NEW STAR WARS MOVIE

The Eye's cut out and keep guide to the most talked about film in the last million years!

Anogud Skymovie — Jedi Princeling and future father of Luke Skysport.

Computa the Graffik — cuddly alien life form who befriends Jedi adviser, Ova the Hype.

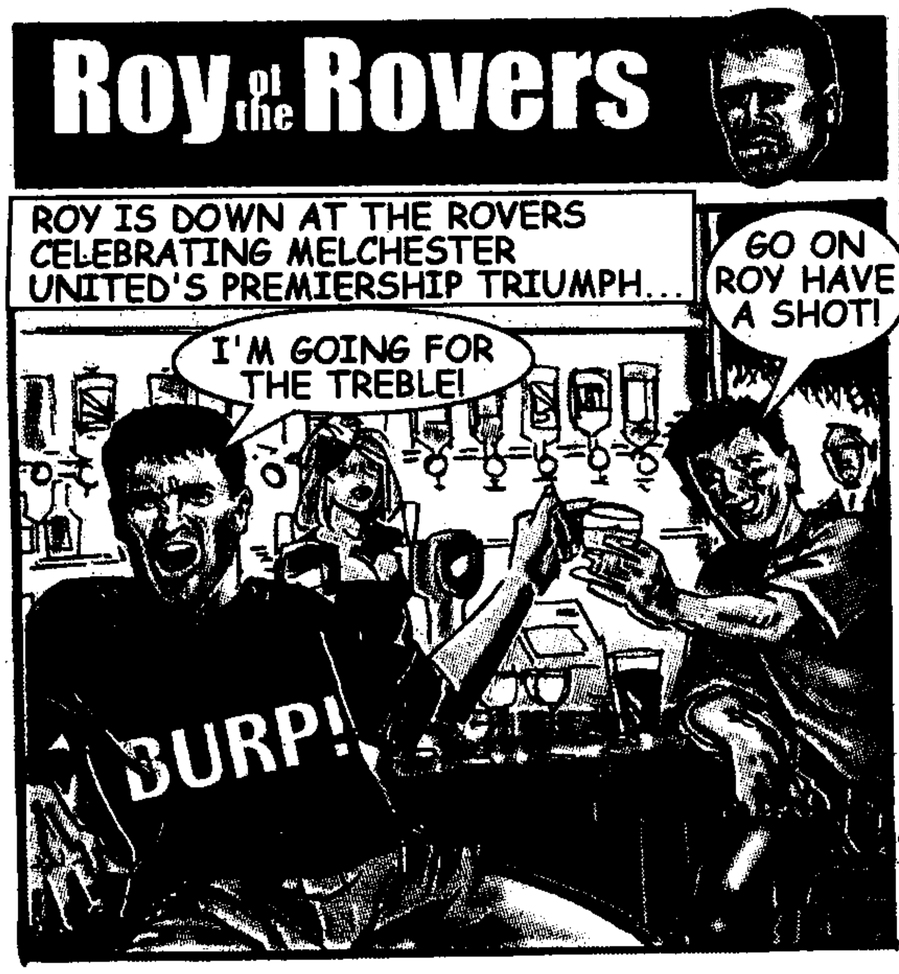
Dearth of Ideaz — Dark Lord and servant of the evil Emperor Palpable-nonsense.

Princess Bora from the Planet ZZZZ — destined to marry Hans Christian Andersen in order to find plot.

NB-G2 — droid friend and accomplice of C5, the revolutionary Sinclair electric car that frees the universe from the evil JarJar-NotWarWar.

Queue Gon Home — Maverick Jedi warlord, brother of Obe Won-for servicestothe-theatre, and servant of Yawner, the Jedi guru.

(That's enough stupid characters from Star Bores. Ed.)



WE REVEAL THE 'SCOOP' ADDICTS – Slaves To A Craving They Cannot Control

By The Eye's Investigative Reporter N. TRAPMENT

THEY LIVE in a twilight world of criminality, vice and big money. They are the "scoop" addicts who need a weekly "fix" merely to survive.

In a squalid warehouse in Wapping we spoke to one pathetic employee of the News of the World, who had travelled all the way to the South of France to "score".

COKE CANNES

She told us, "I had to pretend to be a fresh young party-goer in order to get the dope on Tom Parker-Bowles.

"I hadn't had a story in weeks, and I was desperate. I would have done anything.

"Luckily, I met this bloke who knew this bloke who rang some other bloke on his mobile, who fixed me up with just what I needed.

"All I had to do was go up to this young hooray, and say 'I really fancy you. Can you get me some coke, and I'll show you a nice time.'

"He said, 'er, yes, OK, I think I might know some chap I was at Eton with, who does that sort of thing.'

"Immediately I felt a rush of euphoria which is difficult to describe in words. I was on a real high. It is something you only get with really high-grade stuff."

SNOW BUSINESS

This poor girl is only one of a small army of misfits, drop-outs and social rejects who hang around Wapping, with their shadowy "Mr Big", or "Mr Dig", as he is known.

Another addict we spoke to described the almost incredible lengths to which he had gone to inject some life into his pathetic newspaper.

"I dressed up as an Arab," he confessed, "and spent weeks following this BBC DJ around in the hope that he would give me what I wanted.

"Finally, he delivered, and it was real top-grade shit, even if it did cost hundreds of thousands of pounds of Rupert Murdoch's money."

"Still working for the Open University?"

HISTORY MADE AS DEWAR UNVEILS TEAM

by Our Scottish Political Staff
Lunchtam O'Shanter

Edinburgh, Tuesday

HISTORY was made again today when, after two weeks of tough, behind-the-scenes bargaining, Donald Dewar, Scotland's first ever First Minister, announced to an astonished world what he called "the most impressive Scottish political team ever assembled in Scotland".

That top Dewar team in full:

● **Donny Dewar**, 75, King of Scotland, Lord of the Isles and former husband of the wife of the Laird of Lairg (Derry Irvine).

● **Jim McLoon**, 41, Lib Dem Deputy First-King and Thane of Cawdor, with special responsibility for safety in the workplace.

● Ms **Sheena McShona**, 32, high-flying former dental hygienist who now steps up to take on the tricky, Heath, Sport, Croft Develop-ment and Racial Awareness in the Fisheries Industry portfolio.

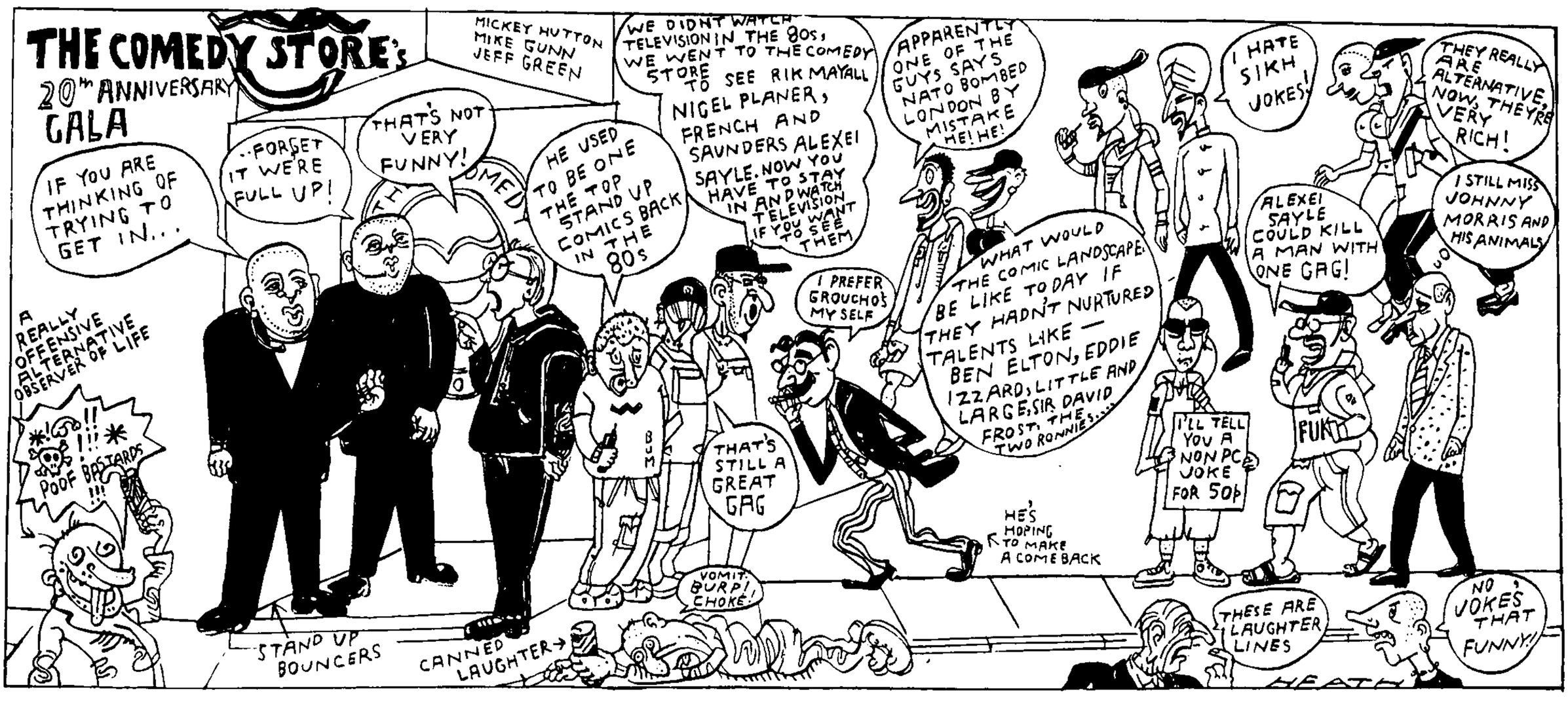
● **Patsy McSweater**, 33, a friend of Gordon Brown's secretary's aunt, who formerly worked in the Dumfries Libraries Department, now takes on the pivotal post of Minister for Coordinating Internet Development, Tourism and Puffin Control.

● **Menzies McThingus**, 46, Lib Dem elder statesman, who graduates from his former post as Co-Chair of the Lothian Business Link Development Partnership to become Minister for Highland Games, Drug Enforcement and Solar Windfarms.

Said Dewar, as he introduced his team to the world's waiting newsmen, "Make no mistake. These are the men, women and Liberal Democrats who are going to forge Scotland into a country fit for the 21st century.

"Full details," he said, "can be found on the Home Rule page of our new website www.scotbore.co.notuk"

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW


THE COMEDY STORE's 20th ANNIVERSARY GALA
MICKEY HUTTON
MIKE GUNN
JEFF GREEN
IF YOU ARE THINKING OF TRYING TO GET IN...
..FORGET IT WERE FULL UP!
THAT'S NOT VERY FUNNY!
HE USED TO BE ONE OF THE TOP STAND UP COMICS BACK IN THE 80s
WE DIDNT WATCH TELEVISION IN THE 80s, WE WENT TO THE COMEDY STORE TO SEE RIK MAYALL NIGEL PLANER, FRENCH AND SAUNDERS ALEXEI SAYLE. NOW YOU HAVE TO STAY IN AND WATCH TELEVISION IF YOU WANT TO SEE THEM
APPARENTLY ONE OF THE GUYS SAYS NATO BOMBED LONDON BY MISTAKE HE! HE!
I HATE SIKH JOKES!
THEY REALLY ARE ALTERNATIVE, NOW, THEYRE VERY RICH!
I STILL MISS JOHNNY MORRIS AND HIS ANIMALS
ALEXEI SAYLE COULD KILL A MAN WITH ONE GAG!
I PREFER GROUCHO'S MY SELF
WHAT WOULD THE COMIC LANDSCAPE BE LIKE TODAY IF THEY HADN'T NURTURED TALENTS LIKE — BEN ELTON, EDDIE IZZARD, LITTLE AND LARGE, SIR DAVID FROST, THES TWO RONNIES....
A REALLY OFFENSIVE ALTERNATIVE OBSERVER OF LIFE
!!! * POOF BASTARDS !!!
THAT'S STILL A GREAT GAG
BUM
VOMIT BURP! CHOKE!
HE'S HOPING TO MAKE A COME BACK
I'LL TELL YOU A NON PC JOKE FOR 50p
FUK
THESE ARE LAUGHTER LINES
NO JOKES THAT FUNNY!
STAND UP BOUNDERS
CANNED LAUGHTER
HEATH

Daily Milosevic

FRIDAY, MAY 28, 1999 THE PAPER THAT SUPPORTS OUR MURDERERS (EDITOR PHIL GRAVES)

HATED REGIME BEGINS TO CRUMBLE

London Tuesday

THE evil tyranny of dictator Tony Blair was at last beginning to show cracks after a rebellion in his own government rocked the British capital last night.

Blair's colleagues were in open defiance of their despised leader and his despotic rule when over three top members of parliament voiced concern over his policies about disability benefit, the right to a trial by jury and his conduct of the war against Serbia.

Blair's popularity rating has fallen to a dismal 98%, and political commentators are openly predicting that he will fall from power within the next twenty years. His attempts to manipulate the media and *(cont. p. 94)*

INSIDE: Your bombed trains tonight 4, Win a dream home in Kosovo! (Thousands to be given away) 6, Why NATO must give up by John Pilger (Reprinted from the Guardian) 94

That Muhammad Ali Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS AD MUHAMMADUM ALI, NATUS CASSIUS CLAYENSIS, PUGILLISSIMUS NOTABILE ET VICTOR LUDORUM MUNDORUM SUPRA SUNNIUS LISTONIUS, JOSEPHUS FRAZIERIUS ("FUMANDE JOE"), HENRICIUS COOPERUS BRITANNICAE ET GEORGIUS FOREMANUS IN AFRICA ("RUMBELLUS IN JUNGELLO"). MEMORAMUS TUUM DICTUM IMMORTALIUS "VOLARE QUAM PAPILIO, STINGERE QUAM APIS" ET TAM FREQUENTE APPARITIONES IN DIALOGO CUM MICHAELO PARKINSONE (VULGARE "PARKY"). CONVERTUS AD FIDE ISLAMICO, ET PACIFISTICUS ET DRAFTENDO DODGERIUS QUAM PRESIDENTIUS CLINTSTONIUM, ET CEREBELLO INVALIDATO PER INCESSANTE PUMELLANDO, NUNC AWARDAMUS NONSENSICUS DOCTORE LITTERARAE.

©MCLXXXXIX Universitatis Columbiae in Novo Eboracum ('Novo Eboracum, Urbs Mirabilis')

COURT CIRCULAR

HIGHGROVE

HRH The Prince of Wales will give a lecture on "The Dangers Of Drug Abuse" to an invited audience of his two sons, HRH Prince William and HRH Prince Harry. The Princes will shuffle nervously, look at the floor and display signs of embarrassment as their father discusses matters about which they know more than he does.

HRH The Prince Of Wales will then deliver a second lecture by telephone to the son of the Mistress Royal, Mr Thomas Coker-Knows, on "The Dangers Of Speaking To The Popular Press". The Royal Equerry, Air Vice-Commodore Archibald Trumper-Smythe will then replace the receiver on the cradle, before ringing the Press Association to acquaint them with the details of the above exchanges.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

HRH the Duke of Edinburgh will grant an audience to Mr Gyles Brandreth, the former television personality and Conservative MP, in which he will attempt to answer a barrage of fearless and probing questions such as "Would it be right to say, Your Majesty, that no one has done more than you, sire, to uphold the institution of monarchy?"

DIARY

"How on earth do you keep your skin so fabulous? Do tell!" I was chatting to one of my very dearest friends, the infinitely glamorous Ivana Trump.

"You know, Joan," she replied, pouring me another cup of Mascara Herbal Tea, which darkens your lashes as you drink it, "I think the greatest beauty secret of all is love. But you have to love yourself first, because unless you love yourself you can't expect to be loved in return."

"That's so true, Ivana!" I said. I learnt to love myself thirty years ago and I've never looked back. My husbands have been the beneficiaries — all four of them, five including the next one, six if you count the one after. "But tell me, Ivana," I continued, lovingly, "how on earth do you manage to hide all those broken veins, darling? You are brilliant! From this distance, one can hardly see them at all! And, believe me, you have the most fabulously toned *derrière* I've ever seen on a woman over sixty."

"I'm thirty-nine, darling. Have a top-up!" replied Ivana, pouring another cup of herbal tea over my lap.

● *JOAN'S TOP TIP: The Hunza Tribe from the Himalayas are known for their longevity. Their secret? Clarins Cocoa Butter Skin Firming Gel with a Dior Foundation.*

Angie Dickinson, a fellow Gemini, has achieved incredible harmony in her life. Two personal trainers, three children, four husbands, five houses, six face lifts. "You still look gorgeous, Angie, even though you've put on a bit of weight since I last saw you! Just how do you *do* it, Angie?" I asked her, casting an admiring eye over her chins, both absolutely perfect. "Let us into the secret of your beauty routine! It must be pretty extensive!"

"My skin is quite dry, Joan," she replies candidly. "So, my health consultant has concocted a special recipe. Beat two eggs thoroughly and apply the mixture to your face and neck. Add a rasher of bacon and a grilled tomato. Rest for twenty minutes while they harden, then pour on a cup of lukewarm milky coffee, Costa Rican for preference. Now add a mug of cold porridge and keep it there for five hours. Then, if you are attending a top Los Angeles brunch party for glamorous high-fliers, you can simply lie down on the trestle table and let guests serve themselves."

"That makes so much sense, Angie! Now

JOAN COLLINS & FRIENDS

tell me your basic philosophy of life. Is it, by any chance, 'My body is my temple. Come all ye hither, and worship'?"

"But first, Joanie," says Angie, "Please, please, *please* tell me how you get that fabulous bloodshot effect in your eyes — or are they naturally that red?"

● *JOAN'S TOP TIP: Even if you are poor, fat and ugly you can still have a great time. Below-stairs jobs can be marvellously rewarding — and you might just get to meet a fabulous superstar from one of TV's leading mini-series!*

For over four decades now, Shirley Bassey has been one of Britain's most enduring stars. At well over sixty years old, she is still able to almost fill the smaller auditorium of the Empire Ballroom, Swansea. Her diehard fans, many of them now in their late seventies and early eighties, hang on to her every word as she yells her way through a shattering medley of her three hit singles, a stunning reminder of the Sixties, the decade in which she first became a grandmother. From a distance and in the right light, she really doesn't look a day over sixty-seven.

"Why is it, Shirley," I asked, "that so many young people today go out without make-up? Whatever happened to family values, Shirley?"

Shirley adjusted her eyelashes meditatively. At just five foot three inches, her 170 pounds are exceedingly well distributed, particularly in the area of the upper arms. "They simply don't know the meaning of the world glamour," she agreed, taking out her hand-mirror and discreetly wiping her lipstick off her front teeth.

"What I think is desperately sad is the end of glamour on TV," I continued, while Shirley readjusted her gorgeous wig so that it made room for her expensive nose. "Shows these days leave nothing to the imagination. Tastelessness, vulgarity and coarseness are the order of the day. Where's the mystery, where's the magic, Shirley? One longs for the golden days of real entertainment — shows like 'Dynasty', 'The Bitch' and 'The Stud'."

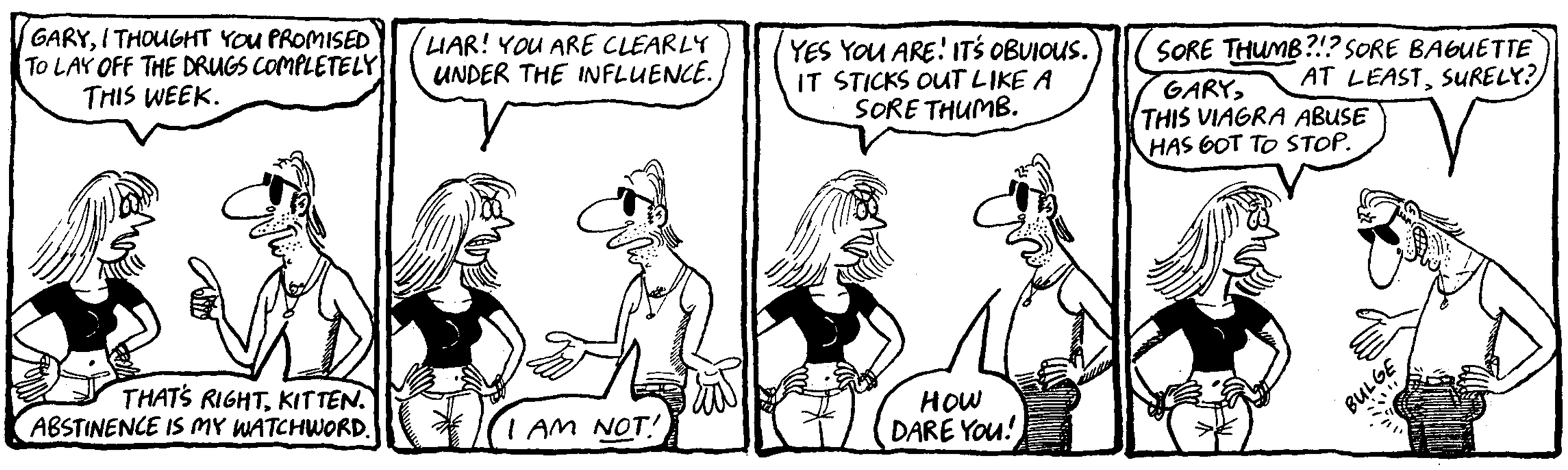
"You know what my motto is, Joan?" replied Shirley, helping herself to another serving of ice-cream with added sun-block. "My motto is 'Never forget to dental floss'." And with that, this gorgous, vibrant lady takes out her teeth and gives them a jolly good going-over.

● *JOAN'S TOP TIP: Remember to look after yourself after death. To look really polished, your skeleton will benefit from a bi-monthly application of deep-cleansing moisturising cream from Laboratoire Garnier. And the great thing about being dead is that it lets you cut down on fatty foods and maintain a gorgeously trim figure!*

Shirley Maclaine and I go back a long way. The first time we met, I was married to Anthony Newley, and she was going out with my second husband. The next time, she was going out with Anthony Newley, and I was going out with her brother. The next time, her third husband was going out with my second husband, her brother was going out with my first husband's wife, Shirley was now married to my fourth husband, and I was in the process of divorcing her fiancée. Through it all, neither of us abandoned our hard-won belief in old-fashioned family values.

Shirley is an intensely spiritual person. For her, inner peace is not just a matter of the right lip-gloss. It requires repeated applications of Fabiella eye cream. "I've been a mystic since I was very small," Shirley told me. "I believe we are all on a journey into our own search. The search for inner peace, Joanie, is all about life energy and centring yourself, so that you come to realise we have been here many times before, and your mother was once your own daughter and..."

But by this time I was late for my appointment with the gorgeously-preserved Betty Bloomingdale, so I crept out and left her to it — an amazing, life-enhancing woman never more interesting than when talking to herself.


GARY, I THOUGHT YOU PROMISED TO LAY OFF THE DRUGS COMPLETELY THIS WEEK.
THAT'S RIGHT, KITTEN. ABSTINENCE IS MY WATCHWORD.
LIAR! YOU ARE CLEARLY UNDER THE INFLUENCE.
I AM NOT!
YES YOU ARE! IT'S OBVIOUS. IT STICKS OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB.
HOW DARE YOU!
SORE THUMB?!? SORE BAGUETTE AT LEAST, SURELY?
GARY, THIS VIAGRA ABUSE HAS GOT TO STOP.
BULGE

Literary Review

Flett-sharing

The Heart-Shaped Bullet
Kathryn Flett
Picador, £9.99

YOU have to feel sorry for newspapers these days. So many pages to fill, so little to write about. There's not enough news to go round and anyway, who's interested in news? Certainly most journalists aren't — not when there are features to write, or top-of-head think pieces, or best of all, top-of-head regular weekly columns about nannies, gardeners, hypochondriac spouses and chortlesome visits to the local tandoori.

Car broken down? Call the lovably useless mechanic from the garage round the corner. Boiler bust? Call the lovably useless plumber with the humorous speech defect. Nothing happened at all? Never mind, make it up, 800 words on the fax by lunchtime and the rest of the day's yours.

Kathryn Flett was not the worst columnist in Fleet Street: if she had been, she would have been snapped up by the *Sunday Times* long ago. Her weekly splurge at the back of the *Observer* showed all the insight and subtlety you would expect from someone who had spent a decade or more in fashion journalism, but otherwise it was indistinguishable from all the others. It was there, and you could read it if you wished, so you usually didn't.

Only when she began to anatomise the failure of her marriage did Flett's column attract attention. The extraordinary impact of columns by John Diamond and Ruth Picardie — columns that people actually read, that actually affected their lives — was bound to inspire imitators, and although Being Dumped By A Love Rat did not have quite the same edge as terminal illness (if this sounds heartless, it's only mirroring the thoughts of commissioning editors up and down the land), it was nonetheless About Something, which Flett's column had never been before.

Crucially, Flett began receiving letters. Editors like letters. If writers are getting letters, then someone is reading them. Never mind that most writers of letters to newspapers are either elderly, unemployed or living in seaside B&Bs under assumed names having recently escaped from long-term mental institutions. (The *Daily Mail* receives more letters than most other newspapers put together.) What counts is the quantity. One plastic bagful a week and you're making a impact. Two or three bagfuls and it's time to ask for a pay rise.

Flett's column, then, was unusual, even original. But that doesn't mean it was much good. Humourless, superficial, self-regarding and vindictive, it traded under the banner of candour, mistaking this (as so many solipsists do) for honesty. Others who had been Dumped By A Love Rat adored it, but the general reader felt excluded, repelled by the column's relentless self-loathing. Maybe Flett saw it as some form of therapy, although revenge seems nearer the mark.

The saving grace of newspapers is their ephemerality, and this is doubly true of most columns. A rare few, such as Diamond's and Picardie's, transcend these natural limitations, are republished as books, sell in huge numbers and make a difference. The dangerous stage in this process is "sell in huge numbers", for this encourages publishers to repackage any old confessional column in the hope that it, too, will catch on and make everyone a tidy sum.

When Flett's column ended last year, that should ideally have been that, but by some mysterious process Picador became involved and the result is the elegantly appointed trade paperback that concerns us here. What was once read and quietly forgotten has now been reread and widely reviewed, sometimes cruelly, sometimes quite staggeringly viciously.

The book, needless to say, is virtually unreadable. Even the many friends quoted in the acknowledgements at the end (Terence Trent D'Arby?) may struggle through some of its more self-pitying passages. Sometimes, unable to bear any more, you realise she is writing a book about writing a column about the failure of her marriage, and then wondering why her marriage failed. But long before you reach the end — a challenge that will defeat all but the most stout-hearted — you will be feeling profoundly sorry for Flett. She has suffered in vain. She has turned her life into a book which has been universally rubbished, even by her own sister paper. However low her self-esteem may have been before, only pot-holers will find it now.

So who benefits from the publication of this book? Not Flett, obviously, nor her ex-husband, whom she portrays as an unfeeling psychopath and, worse, management consultant. (The *Observer* just looks foolish for ever publishing any of it in the first place.) Only Picador will do well out of this, and it doesn't count. Perhaps it will serve mainly as a warning to other columnists not to get too big for their boots. So remember, everyone: always write for yourself. The day your readership rises to two is the day the trouble starts.

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ MUTED celebration at Faber, whose author Andrew Motion has joined the likes of Colley Cibber and Alfred Austin as poet laureate.

Motion, whose political manipulations had already made him less than popular at the company, forfeited much of the sympathy left for him when he went into print in the *Sunday Times* with his creepy poem about his last meeting with Ted Hughes.

Those who felt genuine loss at Hughes' death were appalled that Motion should have gone public with a work that, in the circumstances, could be seen only as a job application. Hence the willingness of fellow Faber poets to go on the record with remarks like: "No one reads Andrew. You would only keep his books beside your bed if you had difficulty sleeping at night."

■ WHICH anonymous Forward Prize-winning poet called Andrew Motion's likely appointment "a bag of shite" in the *Grauniad* last week? "I curse the bloody lot of them. They're cowards and hypocrites," continued Motion's greatest fan.

The smart money is on ribald Scot Don Paterson, who won the Forward gong for best first collection in 1993 and now edits Picador's poetry list as well as having his own work published, like Motion, by Faber and Faber.

The ever-eloquent Paterson recently revealed his involvement in a literary festival in Salisbury, which will attempt to take poetry to the masses by the bizarrest means. "There's going to be poetry everywhere," he told the thrilled audience at a reading in central London. "We'll even have poems tattooed on people, glazed into tiles in public lavatories, and shaved into dogs' arses."

■ *ANDREW Motion defended himself against accusations that he is a career poet in an interview given to literary magazine* The Devil *shortly before his appointment.*

In the journal, funded by the Arts Council literature panel (former chairman: A. Motion), he proposes a pay rise to "twenty grand" for "new" Labour's "new" bard.

Now he's got the job, magnanimous Motion is prepared to break with his principles and settle for a measly £5,000 a year — perhaps in memory of his well-loved predecessor who received just £70 a year for his duties.

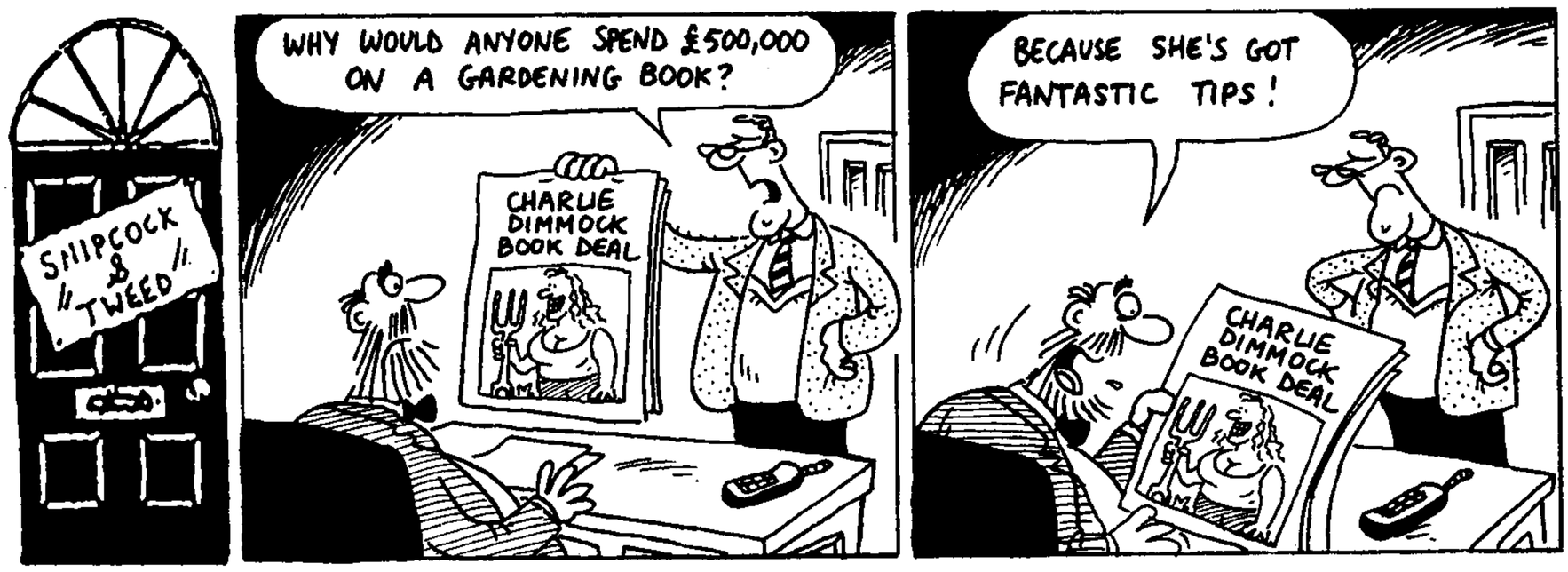
■ CULTURE secretary Chris Smith was all sweetness and light at the launch of Barbican Centre chief John Tusa's new Methuen book *Art Matters* – even though Targs' effort contains a robust review of Smith's own disposable offering *Creative Britain* (see Eye 957).

Addressing the assembled luvvies, Smith observed "I don't know who's being braver: John for inviting me… or me for accepting."

Alas, there was a limit to Smith's bravery. His appearance was strictly conditional on there being no mention of the Shadow Arts Council, a pressure group which is strongly critical of government arts policy (and has Tusa as vice-chairman).

■ **MACMILLAN has played a blinder with its press release for Anthony Ginsberg's *South Africa's Future: From Crisis to Prosperity*, a study of the post-apartheid political scene. The quote Macmillan has used to illustrate the author's no-nonsense approach is a classic. Apparently "It's time to call a spade a spade."**

■ BEFORE publication of Tom Bower's *Fayed: The Unauthorized Biography* last November, Charkin was deluged with calls and legal letters from the Phoney Pharaoh, attempting to stall publication. Throughout, Fayed insisted on seeing a copy of the book before publication. Charkin politely declined until the day of publication. Charkin then had a copy biked to the Egyptian grocer's sinister Knightsbridge eyrie on the day that the book hit the shops. However, this was no good to Fayed who, having failed in all his delaying ploys, sent the book back to Macmillan by return of messenger with a rather rude note saying "I trust that Mr Charkin will know where to stick it".


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
WHY WOULD ANYONE SPEND £500,000 ON A GARDENING BOOK?
CHARLIE DIMMOCK BOOK DEAL
BECAUSE SHE'S GOT FANTASTIC TIPS!
CHARLIE DIMMOCK BOOK DEAL

More Books →

Over written and over there

East of the Mountains
David Guterson
(Bloomsbury, £16.99)

STUDENTS of the classic American novel may recall the passage rather a famous passage — in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath (1939) where, old Grampa Joad having dramatically croaked out on the California trail, Preacher Casy is invited to say a few words over the shrivelled corpse.

"This ol' man jus' lived an' jus' died out of it" Casy obligingly pipes up. "I don't know whether he was good or bad, but that don't matter much. He was alive, an' that's what matters..." Tracking this considerable monologue through to its end, the reader turns increasingly suspicious. Not only did nobody ever speak like this (which is true of the dialogue of any novel you care to name) but the speed at which everything scene, character, plot — threatens to dissolve into a kind of figurative soup is a bit too rapid for comfort. There are times when a death just ought to be a death.

As the fanfare of trumpets greeting *East of the Mountains* amply demonstrates, this sort of thing has been making a barnstorming comeback on the other side of the Atlantic. Yes siree. *The Bridges of Madison County, Snow Falling On Cedars*, Guterson's previous bestseller (a touchstone of the genre, by the way, is how cold it always gets) — everywhere around us US novelists are busy racking up big, elemental emotions experienced by big, elemental guys and their slightly smaller but still infallibly elemental girls. Love, death, scenery straight out of the *National Geographic*, glances at our national heritage (such books are invariably hymns to an older America that is steadily slipping away) – don't you just love it?

Actually, blanket disparagement of these despatches from middle America would be a mistake, if only because they form such a potent antidote to the principal energising force of late-twentieth century American fiction. Early modern masters like Dreiser and Upton Sinclair were merely awed by the spectacle of a country taking shape around them. Their successors, Mailer, Updike, Roth and co, were interested in that kind of thing, too, as they could hardly fail to be, but what they really liked, albeit in various fictional guises, was writing about themselves. In a world made safe for neurotic solipsists — and does anyone remember the New Journalism? — stumbling upon a novel that isn't simply a list of the novelist's personal irritations and anxieties can be a real treat.

As, for quite a long stretch of the racetrack, is *East of the Mountains.* The plot is old-style Yankee classic. A widowed former heart surgeon named Ben Givens, now suffering from terminal cancer, figures on marching out into the countryside outside Seattle where he was raised and blowing his head off with a shotgun. Things don't go according to plan (auto smash, injured dog, abstracted firearm) and detours come thick and fast, along with continual pauses for reflection on time gone by — upbringing on a nearby apple farm, courtship, war service in the Italian campaign, marriage to his much-mourned wife.

What weakens this finely written and sturdily plotted tale is a desperate portentousness that can't let anything alone — people who say just a little bit more than they would say (and say it just a little more picturesquely), scenes that erupt without warning — or sometimes with a bit too much warning — into symbolic mushroom clouds.

This is especially noticeable in the dialogue: the army surgeon who, having brought back a grievously mangled GI from the dead, observes off-handedly to the wide-eyed Givens, now plotting his adult career, "We'll talk about it after the war"; the store owner who, as Givens joshes with a Greyhound bus driver, declares "My God. What is it with men? Whatever will we do with you?" In a novel weighed down with huge amounts of metaphorical baggage you just don't need a sentence like "The heart, for Ben, was tangible — and nothing tangible remains." Except perhaps the sleeve on which the heart is visible.

Appropriately enough, the most flagrant chunk of symbolism is left for the end, when Givens delivers a Mexican fruit-picker's baby before heading back home (dying man assists birth — geddit?) leaving the reader, well, a bit exhausted by the relentless stage-management. Undoubtedly, this kind of stuff has the edge over the Madison Avenue egotists, but...

It would be injudicious, perhaps, to intervene in the "Why are American writers better than us?" debate that forms such a tedious and unshiftable backdrop to English literary life (see the recent row about this year's Orange Prize shortlist) and no doubt Chertsey is a less interesting place to write about than Nevada. One thing the English novel doesn't possess, though, and whose absence we should all thank God for, is this altogether deathless *staginess.*

"That's Andrew Motion's Muse"

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Professor Lola Young defends this year's Orange Prize shortlist...

My fellow Americans,

I was disappointed that the media fixated on the question of Britain's national literary reputation, as this distracted people from an informed and meaningful discussion about the six wonderful books on this wonderful shortlist. The judges found it extremely difficult to choose six titles from the 20 we had long-listed because, let's face it, women these days are such wonderful writers. Especially American ones.

What qualities mark a novel as excellent? We might include such characteristics as the author's ability to create an imaginary world in which the reader becomes immersed, being written by a woman, being written by an American woman, or providing fresh insights into the problems and issues facing American women today. Re-reading the shortlisted entries I am struck by the number of compelling themes which recur, rather than any pattern relating to national boundaries.

Both Jaylene C. Watermelon's *USA Today* and Marvella Hackensack's *I Heard the Whippoorwill Cry*, for example, started by focusing on a small American town, but each invites the reader to meditate on the wider significance of the emotions thereby outlined and the fact that these things are so much more believable when set in Nowhere, Nebraska. Similarly, Poppy D. Frankfurter's *Mouth Fulla Hominy Grits* drew universal significance from its depiction of a Kentucky trailer park attendant who fails in her ambition to appear on the *Jerry Springer* show. (*Cont. P.94*)

Pseuds Corner

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTSHIPS
Cultural, Communications and Media Studies:
Body Hair: a Cultural Study of the Technologies of Regulation and Management of Body-boundaries.
Enquiries to Dr Joost van Loon.

Nottingham Trent University, Humanities Faculty advertisement

Presumably, Delia Smith woke one morning and wondered what the point was of pontificating about garlic emulsions and balsamic vinegar when the art of boiling an egg had all been forgotten.

Gianluca Vialli has not yet had that vision. For sure, Chelsea can puree and pestle, sweat and simmer, they can add just the right amount of coriander and produce al dente veg while half asleep — but, as for buttering bread or frying an egg, they appear to have lost the art.

ALYSON RUDD
The Times

She [Xfm DJ Claire Sturgess] has vivid memories of growing up in the 1980s. "The one thing that stays in my mind was the miners' strike. I was too young to understand what was really going on, but I just saw a lot of pain on people's faces. Mrs Thatcher never showed the least bit of compassion. And the Falklands: my dad knew a guy who came back with no legs. Then the Gulf

War. Kosovo. I cry my eyes out. You feel so helpless — what can you do?"

And then she's back in upbeat DJ mode. "What makes me happy? Finishing Tomb Raider III on the PlayStation, watching South Park and The Simpsons on TV. Things upset me, but life is too short. I'll sit in my flat with the TV on, sound turned down, album on, surfing the Net, flicking through magazines. I'm basically one of those dorky teenage boys that just sits at home playing computer games all day."

Sunday Times

COMMUNICATION THEORY AS A FIELD

RT Craig (Department of Communication, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA)

This essay reconstructs communication theory as a dialogical-dialectical field according to two principles: The constructive model of communication as a metamodel and theory as a metadiscursive practice. The essay argues that all communication theories are mutually relevant when addressed to a practical lifeworld in which "communication" is already a richly meaningful term. Each tradition of communication theory derives from and appeals rhetorically to certain commonplace beliefs about communication while challenging other beliefs. The complementaries and tensions among traditions generate a theoretical metadiscourse that intersects with and potentially informs the ongoing practical metadiscourse in society...

Abstract from current issue of *Communication*, Oxford University Press

CONTRIBUTORS: Richard Davoll, A.P.R., Alasdair MacPherson, Robert Matthews.

£10 paid for entries

In the City

PREMIERSHIP soccer club Coventry City's greatest fan, the former paymaster-general and minister for tax avoidance Geoffrey Robinson, is a much relieved man. Not only did the Sky Blues again win their annual battle to escape relegation, but he is no longer out of the £5m he loaned the struggling club. Instead his ever accommodating offshore family trust maybe on the hook for twice that amount.

It has emerged that last year, while Robinson was still a treasury minister and after the links between the offshore Orion Trust and Coventry City had been exposed, Robinson was paid back the £5m he had loaned the loss-making club ahead of time; but the Guernsey family trust, while released from a previously unrevealed guarantee to the club, has "procured" a larger £10m bank guarantee and was paid a tax free £76,000 for its help.

Robinson was able to be repaid as a result of the assistance of Midland Bank, the millionaire Coventry MP's longtime banker, which agreed to lend the club £10m just over a year ago. But only against a guarantee from the Robinson family trust.

As *Eye* readers will know, one of the more interesting aspects of the supposedly independent Guernsey trustees for the Orion Trust is their preparedness to follow Robinson's helpful suggestions. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the trust's involvement with Coventry City.

Soon after Robinson became a director in March 1996 and made the £5m loan, the tax free trust stepped up and paid some £1.24m for a 26 percent stake in the club. These shares were held through Craigavon, a company in the British Virgin Islands tax haven. Several months later the trust paid a further £350,000 for more shares.

Throughout this period Robinson personally was owed £5m by the club as a result of making it a five-year, no security, interest-free loan with which to buy key players.

Tax experts were deeply puzzled by this very "soft" loan because as it benefited the club (by saving interest charges) in which the Orion Trust was a major shareholder the Revenue could claim that this in effect made Robinson a settlor of the trust. And that would have brought Orion Trust onshore and liable for UK tax. Not part of the programme desired by Robinson or his bountiful Belgian benefactor Mme Joska Bourgeois, whose money funded Orion.

The sheer generosity of the loan also raised questions about how Robinson could afford such a gesture. Was it perhaps the case that the £5m had been one of the tax free distributions the Orion Trust had made to Robinson and his family before he became a minister in May 1997?

But what now emerges in the latest Coventry City accounts is that by end of May last year that whole curious financial situation had been rearranged. The money from Midland Bank was used to repay loans totalling £9.95m which had been made to buy players. This included the £5m "provided" by Robinson.

But the accounts also reveal that Orion Trust had previously guaranteed repayment of the full £9.95m including the money due to Robinson. No mention of this guarantee had been made in the previous accounts for 1996 and 1997. So the Orion Trust's generosity was far greater than had been imagined. Exactly why its independent trustees should have been so generous is a matter perhaps the Inland Revenue will explore now that Robinson is no longer the minister responsible for its activities.

But while Robinson has been repaid the £5m he loaned the club three years early — to invest no doubt somewhat more profitably — the Orion Trust has effectively guaranteed the Midland will be repaid. In return Craigavon has been paid £76,000.

Cynical tax experts wonder whether this is to refute any suggestions that the guarantee is not a commercial arrangement and that the trustees have merely done what Robinson suggested. Especially as there appears to have been no fee for guaranteeing the £9.95m. Surely not.

The guarantees are significant for another reason. They suggest that there is far more in the Orion Trust than just the Coventry shares — worth around £1.5m — or the near 10m shares in TransTec — now worth only £3.4m against a cost price of £10.8m.

Midland Bank would not have accepted a £10m guarantee unless it was collectable. Which suggests the offshore assets of the Guernsey Family Robinson could be well in excess of £10m.

The preparedness of the Orion trustees to provide such large guarantees — even though it could be said it protects their investment in Coventry City shares — also raises once again the question as to just how independent they are of Robinson's suggestions. How can it be prudent to provide a guarantee which much represent a large chunk of the trust's assets to a loss-making football club?

Perhaps Robinson will address such questions in his forthcoming autobiography. Meanwhile suggestions that one of his two Lutyens mansions is for sale signals perhaps that come the next election he will have joined the family trust offshore having exposed the ingratitude of those at the top of "new" Labour who took his or the trust's money and then cast him adrift.

THE trials of Peter "Elizabeth" Young, one-time fund manager turned cross dresser, seems set to run and run well beyond the millennium. The fraud case against the former Morgan Grenfell star has been transferred to the Old Bailey so the medical game can now begin to decide whether Peter and/or Elizabeth is fit to be tried. The problem is that the case papers total some 350,000 pages of documents and transcripts which are certain to take many months to be examined by the lawyers for Young and his three co-defendants. This task is already leading to predictions that any trial will not be feasible before 2001! That of course assumes that Young's legal team do not succeed in proving that he is unfit for trial due to his sudden change in personality and dress plus the inner conflicts between the fund manager and his female alter ego. Pressure to prevent a huge waste of time and legal aid on examining documents for a trial which does not take place is likely to result in a fitness hearing later in the year. No doubt the City will be agog to see the Young autumn look.

AS Saudi Arabia's financial and political situation becomes more fragile, there are growing strains between the ruling family and those who have helped them while also helping themselves.

Latest rumoured casualty of these frictions is said to be Khalid bin Mahfouz, former chief executive of the National Commercial Bank, the largest bank in the kingdom and banker to key figures among the greed-driven Saudi royals.

There is gossip of a row between the banker and certain influential members of the ruling family over payments made regarding a huge Saudi project to store strategic materials. As a result it is even whispered that Sheikh Khalid may be very much out of favour and spending most of his time either in hospital or at home with little opportunity to travel abroad. No doubt these are just malicious, incorrect rumours spread by envious rivals.

Little has been heard of Sheikh Khalid since he settled the fall out from his ill-fated association with the Bank of Conmen & Cocaine International. The sheikh paid $220m in 1993 in a plea bargain which resulted in charges being dropped against him and NCB by the New York district attorney. A year later NCB paid a further $245m to settle claims brought against the bank by the BCCI liquidators.

THE terminal problems at Richmond rugby club have raised questions about whether former benefactor Ashley Levett may be feeling the squeeze despite all the millions he and his Winchester Commodities partner Charley Vincent made before going offshore.

Levett had pumped up to £8m into Richmond in three years for no return. Yet this should have come as no surprise assuming Levett understood what he was buying into with professional rugby union. However, that now seems highly questionable, not just for Levett, who had been involved in rugby previously at Winchester, but for many of the businessmen who thought it was the next big sporting thing.

The timing of Levett's decision to pull the plug on Richmond in March, just before a cup semi-final which could have boosted the club's revenues, suggests it may not have been of Levett's choosing.

Levett was also a victim of Vincent's involvement in the "Ponzi" scheme run by former stockbroker Nicholas Rowley. He did not invest in the fictional high return circular money scam but did give Rowley money to invest. How much of that was recovered was never clear. Nevertheless perhaps the sun is no longer shining so brightly on Levett's Monte Carlo paradise.

'Slicker'

In the Back *See over* ➡

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG

...AND WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT HOWEVER YOUR REMUNERATION PACKAGES ARE MADE UP...
...EVERY SINGLE PENNY OF IT IS PRODUCED BY THE WORKFORCE...
IN THAT CASE, SIR JULIAN, WHAT ARE WE ON THE BOARD SO WELL PAID FOR ?
MAKING EXECUTIVE DECISIONS — YOU'RE FIRED, TOBY !
40.

IN THE BACK

THE SECRET STATE

Cry freedom

WHILE one of the government's senior law officers was putting the final flourishes to Monday's historic plans for a "freedom of information" act – promising very little freedom and even less information about what goes on at the heart of government – it was business as usual for the secret state.

As Derry Irvine, the lord chancellor, finally bowed to colleagues' pressures and published the woefully weak bill, attorney-general John Morris was signing an altogether more sinister document. It was approval for the first ever charge under section 5 of the discredited official secrets act – the one aimed as silencing journalists.

When ministry of defence police first raided the Hereford home of author Tony Geraghty, an expert on the SAS and security services, trying to discover his sources for his latest book, *The Irish War*, no one really believed the crown prosecution service (CPS) would entertain serious criminal charges (see *Eye* 969). After all, the book was – and still is – freely available. And there was no attempt to block it or the "offending" few pages about what everybody knew about computer surveillance in Northern Ireland.

But it seems the CPS, usually notoriously reluctant to bring charges if it does not believe it will get an easy conviction, somehow thinks it will secure one with Geraghty. A curious decision, as juries have famously and consistently made clear their views on the OSA with a series of not guilty verdicts (Clive Ponting; the ABC trial of Duncan Campbell, Crispin Aubrey and John Berry in the Callaghan era; and, from 100 years ago during the time of Harold Wislon, also that of dear Jonathan Aitken.

That a Labour government should be using a blunderbuss to intimidate journalists should not come as a total surprise then. What is curious in these days of "new" Labour's obsession with news management, is that the attorney-general – who always has to approve official secrets prosecutions – apparently took only four days including a weekend to push it through in the month of the government's flagship freedom of information bill.

Two days later arrangements were made for Geraghty to turn up at his local police station in Hereford to be formally charged and fingerprinted. Four MoD police, headed by a detective chief inspector, plus their PR photographer, travelled from their Essex HQ for the task. Mission accomplished, the officers then posed for souvenir snaps outside the police station. Not one to show the grandchildren, if the Old Bailey jury shows its usual contempt for the official secrets act when the trial gets underway in the new year.

*We have been asked to point out a mistake in our last report on the ministry of defence police, a part-privatised, non-accountable agency. We suggested they were "affectionately known as Modplod". Insiders write: "You are very wide of the mark in suggesting that anyone using this nickname does so with any sense of affection." We apologise for this serious error.

BUS PENSIONS

Wheelered off

FRANK WHEELER, the former busman who proved three years ago that the Thatcher government had illegally swiped nearly £200m from his old National Bus company pension funds, has lost his legal fight to become one of the trustees trying to recoup the money.

Sir Richard Scott, vice-chancellor of the high court's chancery division, was full of praise for Mr Wheeler's tenacity in exposing the government rip-off. But he ruled that because the pension fund had been wound up, there was no compulsion to follow normal rules that would guarantee beneficiaries are represented among the trustees.

As *Eye* readers know, the government-appointed trustees have consistently and unjustly refused to include Mr Wheeler, despite his having championed the pensioners' rights.

Mr Wheeler, who is now at least £5,000 out of pocket because of his 12-year fight on the pensioners' behalf, believes the determination to keep him out of the negotiations is because he is viewed as a troublemaker. "They do not want me to get my hands on any more of their documents," he said.

When newly elected, Labour ministers hinted that they would repay to the pensioners all the money snatched by the treasury. Now they appear reluctant. The latest offer on the table is around £100m. In the meantime it has emerged that the department of transport has spent £1m in litigation in the case. Of that £110,000 went on keeping Mr Wheeler out — more than the cost of the democratic ballot of pensioners he was seeking. And far more than the costs of simply allowing him on to the board of trustees in recognition of his ability and achievements.

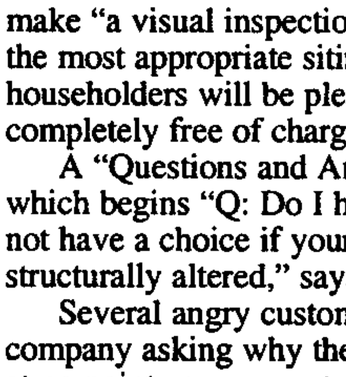
If there is no settlement between the government and the trustees by 9 January next year, there will be a long and costly battle in the high court. Meanwhile none of the 40,000 pensioners has received a penny of the raided money and as every month passes some more of them die. More than a third are now aged over 70.

THAMES WATER

We'll meter gain

THAMES WATER (pre-tax profits last year: £407m) is going to inordinate lengths to foist water meters on its reluctant but captive customers.

It has ordered staff to identify all properties in its area which have received planning permission since 1990 for Structural alterations which, *pre*-1990, might have resulted in the rateable value of the property being increased.



(Dull historical note: pre-1990, water charges were calculated according to a property's rateable value. That value – and hence the water charges – often rose if householders stuck a new garage or bedroom on to their home, even if it didn't increase their water consumption. In part, metering aims to counter this anomaly: metered households only pay for what they use.)

Thames Water supplies around three million properties but says blithely that checking all the local councils in its area for nine years' worth of relevant planning information is "not a huge task".

Thus any Thames customer who has applied for planning permission since 1990 for anything bigger than a porch has received, or will soon receive, a letter from Thames's "Free Meters Manager" Robert Holden. This tells them a surveyor will be calling to make "a visual inspection of the property" to "assess the most appropriate siting of the meter" which, householders will be pleased to know, "will be fitted completely free of charge".

A "Questions and Answers" sheet is provided, which begins "Q: Do I have a choice? A: You do not have a choice if your property has been structurally altered," says Thames.

Several angry customers have written to the company asking why their extra garage, which will at no point use any water, should affect their water bills. In order to increase metering, which is what Thames wants, it is having to justify the illogical system metering was designed to improve.

COMPUTERS

Criminal waste

THE sky's the limit, it seems, for the amount of taxpayers' money the government is prepared to squander on useless computer systems.

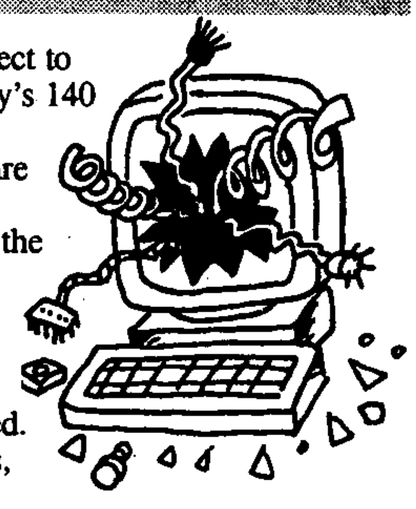
Last month the national audit office (NAO) damned Siemen's £77m "Casework" system which made the cumbersome home office immigration process *more* chaotic. Now, another independent scrutiny has condemned "Crams" – the Bull system that was supposed to revolutionise probation work.

A report by University College London that Crams – the case record and management system – "contains defects which compromise the ability of users to perform their work". More bluntly, Harry Fletcher, who represents the probation officers' trade union, says: "It is dangerous. It is an amazingly complex programme. You can't track the movement of offenders. It's almost impossible to correct mistakes and the format does not provide anywhere to record an assessment of risk to the public."

Until recently Crams (cost: £9m so far) was unable to cross-reference aliases, a basic need when logging the criminal fraternity, you might think. It is now on its fourth update… and still failing.

Probation officers trying to grapple with Crams, which the independent report suggests "comprehensively fails to conform to European design standards", were apparently landed with the "powerhouse" system after some geek in the home office decided in 1993 that "Windows would not catch on". With the millennium clock ticking away, powerhouse is still not bug resistant.

Meanwhile in the prison department, the two-year-old Quantum project to computerise the country's 140 odd jails (cost: about £8m) is… back to square one. It was quietly suspended last year by the prisons board while internal cultural battles prison governors jealously guard their autonomy – were settled. The official reason was, ironically, "the need to balance the need for new IT with our duty to ensure that public money is protected". Now Quantum 2 is up and running (cost: so far unknown), with two of the three original private companies, SEMA and EDS in the frame. Group 4 dropped out.



Across in the lord chancellor's department, where the aim is to link and co-ordinate the country's magistrates' courts, ICL has had a clear-run at securing the lucrative contract. Staff, who fear the spiralling costs of computer modernisation will result in job losses, were told ICL's bid succeeded against a "theoretical" – ie unreal – public service bid.

Confidentiality has prevented unions learning the cost of the contract. But they do know that ICL has managed to secure a year-on-year above inflation increase in its charges, while the magistrates' courts committees who will have to pay for the increases out of their annual budgets are pledged to three percent efficiency savings.

"When ministers talk about an integrated computer system with all these different criminal justice systems 'talking' to each other, we just laugh. They don't even talk coherently to themselves," says Mr Fletcher.

WORLD OF ESPIONAGE

Tinker, tailor, soldier, fugger...

"THE claims are without foundation. Mr Al Fayed has made it plain he does not condone any such publication."

So said the Voice of Harrods – aka the *Mirror* – following the revelation that the Phoney Pharaoh is heavily connected with both Richard Tomlinson, the ex-MI6 agent who had threatened to publish spies' names on the internet, and the even more loony Lyndon LaRouche, who put such a list up on his conspiracy website.

Both these connections are apparently completely coincidental... as is the timing of the list's publication, only days after Fayed was refused a British passport and swore revenge on the "establishment" which he claimed forced the "zombie" politicians to blackball him.

The Phoney Pharaoh has refused to confirm that he met Tomlinson last summer, paying for his travel, as the ex-spy claims, or that he has had any contact with him since. But on many occasions in the last year – most recently last week on Talk Radio – Fayed has quoted Tomlinson's claim that Henri Paul, Diana and Dodi's drunken driver, was in the pay of the spook HQ at Vauxhall Cross. Curiously, he invariably refers to the ex-spy as "Richard Thompson", which could explain his confusion over whether he has met him or not.

Thanks to an early-day motion tabled by MP Gerald Howarth, Fayed now faces a government investigation of his links with Tomlinson, who has been trying to scrape a living as a freelance journalist writing pieces related to his old job.

Presumably though he is not related to the "former agent who cannot be named" who wrote a long piece for Fayed's *Punch* in January on "MI6 and the media", illustrated by a large photo of the editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, Dominic Lawson, dressed as James Bond. If Fayed, as he claimed to the *Sunday Times*, has only had one contact with Tomlinson, and that through his lawyers, the author of that piece must be someone else. Er... a Richard Thompson perhaps?

Meanwhile Fayed's own website, alfayed.com, quickly posted a rebuttal of the claims. "Mohamed Al Fayed categorically denies any knowledge or involvement in the compilation or publication of the names of more than 100 MI6 officers", read his official press release. "He has made it plain that he does not condone nor approve in any way such publication which may expose individuals to danger."

Two sentences later the website does exactly that – ignoring the government's D-notice to name and shame one of the individuals on the list, who just happens to be a close relative of *Sunday Telegraph* editor Dominic Lawson and his wife Rosa Monckton.

Sunday Crimes

IF Tomlinson and Fayed deny having had a hand in supplying a list of British spies to American nutcase Lyndon LaRouche, how did LaRouche get hold of it?

The media have missed another obvious suspect – Patrick Martin, the Swiss-based "freelance investigator" who has been working closely with Tomlinson at his Geneva hideout. Martin is known to have contacts at the European HQ of LaRouche's operation in Wiesbaden. Could this by any chance be related to the sudden appearance of Tomlinson's list on the LaRouche website?

Martin has also been a regular supplier of information to the *Sunday Times*'s David Leppard, but he may be rather more reluctant to cooperate with the Wapping hack following Leppard's two-page article on 16 May which identified Martin as the man who smuggled Tomlinson across the border into France the previous week.

As the *Sunday Times* reported, "Martin knew that, by aiding the 'infiltration' into hostile territory, he might also face the wrath of the French secret services." Indeed: and Leppard is now facing the wrath of the source.

Tomlinson's own attitude to the *Sunday Times* is ambivalent, to say the least. Two weeks ago he mischievously forwarded to David Leppard an email from a Brighton-based hack, Graham Ennis, which included the absurd allegation – presumably meant as a joke – that Leppard received a monthly retainer from MI5. "I just wanted to see his reaction," Tomlinson explained to Ennis. "Rumours of his connections with MI5 are something I have known about for some time, and occasionally tease him about. He always gets very hot under the collar about it!"

He certainly does. Leppard fired off an incandescent reply to Ennis. "I could take you to the cleaners in court," he warned. "But because you are simply a very sad person I take sympathy on you... If you are a man, you will seek to prove that you are not a bullshitter (which you cant [sic])... You are a fantacist [sic], I suggest you try and get a life." He added that if Ennis continued to spread "the same nonsense" he could "expext [sic] to be challenged to justify your claims before my learned friends".

In reply Ennis said he didn't realise Leppard had any friends, learned or otherwise – thus provoking another fusillade from the Sunday Times hack. Needless to say, Ennis's allegation is indeed "nonsense". After its disastrous experience with David Shayler, MI5 would be unlikely to recruit anyone else from the pisspoor *Sunday Times* – and least of all the erratic Leppard, whose previous investigative triumphs include the front-page revelation that Michael Foot "was a KGB agent". This too turned out to be, er, nonsense, which cost the paper a hefty wad for Foot and his learned friends.

STUDENT LOANS

Can't repay, won't repay

AS politicians squabbled over whether the Scottish assembly can abolish student fees, an announcement from the Glasgow-based Student Loan Company (SLC) passed by largely unnoticed.

Amazingly, the number of former students in the UK who cannot afford to start repaying their loans has risen by 25 percent over the past year. And so far, just under half those who graduated last summer have successfully applied to be exempt from repaying due to low earnings.

This figure is likely to rise as the SLC's chronic admininstration system continues to process responses to its pleas for money which go out annually in early April. If the trend continues, the whole system, which the government plans to extend to cover part-time and mature students, is likely to collapse. The SLC has already failed to deal with the increase in demand for its services this year, even though everyone knew tuition fees were being introduced. And customer service continues to deteriorate.

When SLC started working from its Glasgow base, like most large companies operating nationwide it offered an 0345- hotline for the benefit of its generally unwilling consumers. This meant that all phone calls querying payments or notifying changes of address were charged at a local rate. That policy has now been abandoned so for everyone living outside the 0141- area (most SLC clients), a long distance call to Glasgow is now unavoidable. Just to ensure maximum annoyance, while other companies operate evenings, weekends and in some cases 24 hours a day, SLC will talk to customers "between 9.00am and 5.30pm Monday to Friday only," thus ensuring permanently engaged lines (and the most expensive call charges).

To damage this disastrous organisation's image still further, a new set of charges was created for the current academic year. While many banks and building societies have recently abolished ridiculous fees for routine computer generated letters, SLC introduced them for the first time. Students now pay £12 for each standard query letter sent, £10 if direct debit payments fail to materialise on time and "all costs and expenses incurred" if payments have to be chased.

The government once wanted to privatise SLC, but why any bank or finance house would want to buy an institution which seems so determined to anger its captive customer base is a mystery.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

An FO to FE...

THE Eye is pleased to gloat *("note", shurely? Ed.)* that a number of High Principals favourites have been named and shamed by education minister Tessa Blackstone in a rare attack on college mismanagement.

Two years into government, it seems "new" Labour is finally waking up to the corruption and nepotism that has plagued further education colleges since they were "incorporated" (ie privatised) by the previous government in 1993. In particular we are glad to see that Wirral Metropolitan College (see *Eyes* 930, 949, 950, 967, 969) was chosen for a special mention by the baroness.

In a bold announcement on 12 May she said the government "will not tolerate unacceptable standards or hesitate to intervene where colleges are failing their students and communities". In the case of Wirral she added that a new board of governors and management team had been appointed. Unfortunately she failed to mention that Jenny Shackleton, the principal responsible for the mess who was forced to stand down in January amid mounting debts, was also a key member of education secretary David Blunkett's New Deal taskforce, responsible for developing government policy on the longterm unemployed.

Far more puzzling is the inclusion of two other High Principals regulars on Baroness Blackstone's list of "beacon colleges", each of which will receive £50,000 to spread good practice across the beleaguered sector. The baroness heaps praise on Havering College in east London for its "outstanding student support, quality assurance and governance". Lecturers at the college who have been involved in one of the longest-running industrial tribunal cases in FE history might disagree.

Management has told them they can only qualify for pay rises if they come off secure employment contracts (the so-called Silver Book) and negotiate personal short-term contracts. Lawyers are currently challenging this "outstanding" management practice, which has effectively frozen pay at the college for more than two years.

Another 'beacon', Lewisham College in south London, has as its principal Ruth Silver, a woman so vain she has named a college building after herself. The "good practice" that Silver may use her £50,000 to spread to the rest of the sector could include mass redundancies, the systematic employment of cheap freelance lecturers from agencies, the purchase of a chauffeur-driven car and the employment of a Feng Shui expert to help redecorate the principal's office.

Staff at the "beacon" college will also remember the extreme measures Silver employs to stifle dissent. When one lecturer complained to Tony Blair's office about her high-living principal's activities, she found that her conversation had been secretly recorded. Silver warned the woman that she would be severely reprimanded if the tape revealed that she had brought the college into disrepute.

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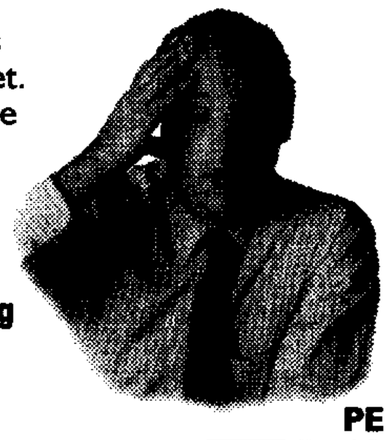

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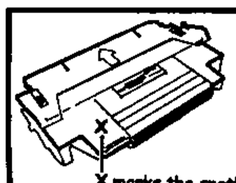

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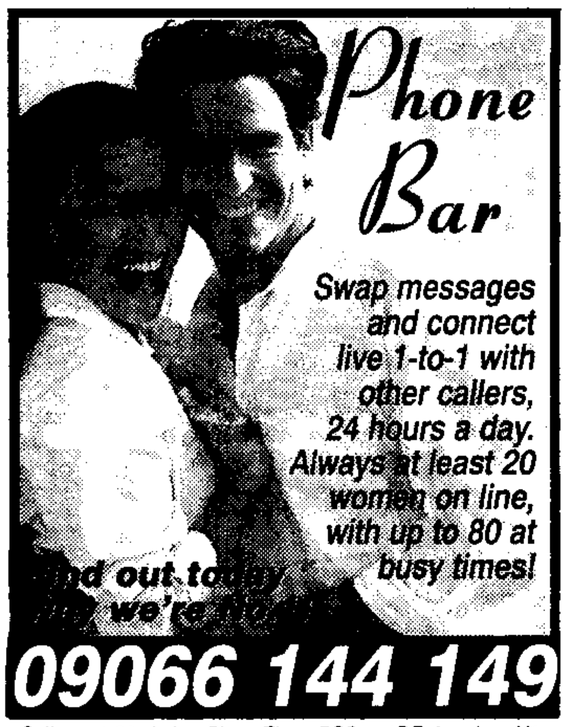
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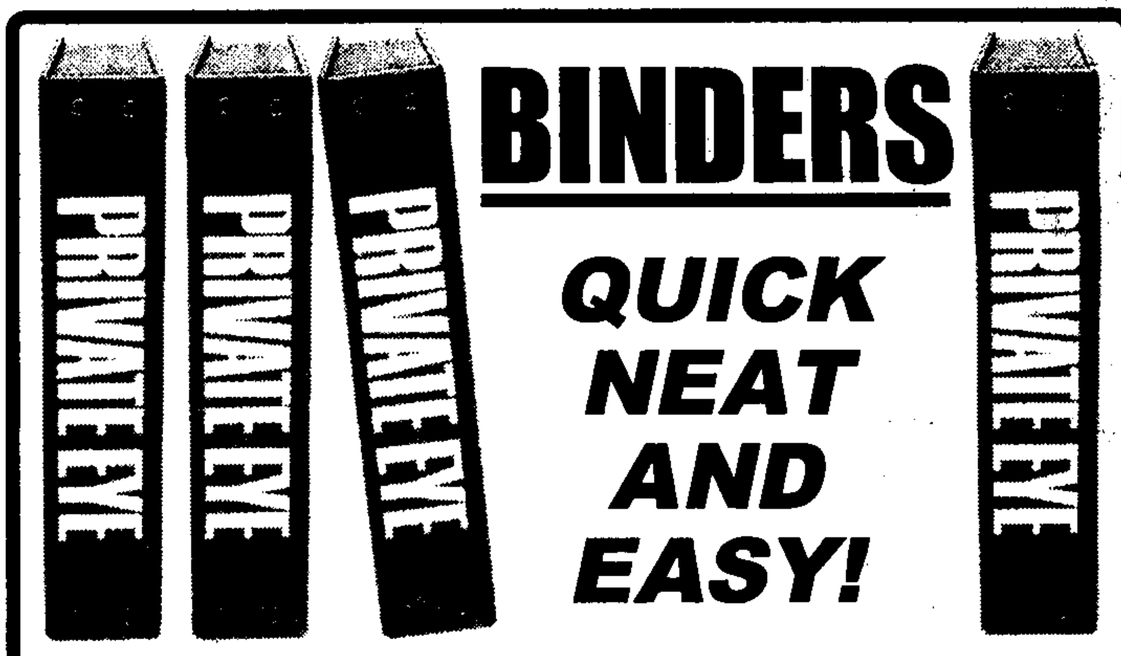

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OXFORD UNDERGRADUATE historian needs £500 for ASIAN TRAVEL. Lloyds 30-94-38, 01586136.

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TRULY DESPERATE – circa £8000 needed to redeem this life. Please, please help. Eternal love and gratitude for anyone who can help in any way. RBS 83 21 10. Account Number 00159407.

FINAL YEAR business studies at LGU. £8000 in debt. Need funding for MA – Barclays, 20-31-52, 40177954.

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PLEASE HELP. Desperately need funds to help reduce £90,000 debt. Box 2877.

AMBITIOUS WOMAN needs funding for Environmental Project in India. Costs £3000. Sort Code: 20-17-19, Ac. No: 10398721.

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